

**The regional novel in Italy and Great Britain in the  
late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: a  
comparative study of selected works by Giovanni  
Verga, Grazia Deledda, Thomas Hardy, and David  
Herbert Lawrence**

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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed exclusively by myself and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified:

1) A very minor percentage (certainly inferior to 10%) of the thesis work was submitted for the MSc degree in Practice and Theory of Translation, University of Edinburgh, academic year 1999/2000, in my dissertation “The Audience in *Elias Portolu*: The Translation of a Regional Novel”. The occasional overlapping occurs as regards the plot, and the linguistic and cultural analysis of Grazia Deledda’s novel *Elias Portolu*. However, being very limited, it has been judged, also with the approval of my supervisor, Dr Federica G. Pedriali, unnecessary to include the relevant paragraphs of the MSc dissertation in an Appendix section of this thesis.

2) An extract of the same MSc dissertation has been published, with the approval of my supervisor Dr Federica G. Pedriali, under the title “The Audience in *Elias Portolu*: The Translation of a Regional Novel” in the Edinburgh University refereed electronic journal *Arachnofiles: A Journal of European Languages and Cultures*, Issue 3 (Spring 2004): Selected Papers from the Society for Italian Studies Postgraduate Colloquium 2003 (Edinburgh, 24 May 2003), edited by Luisa Carrer. This paper, which can be consulted at <[www.selc.ed.ac.uk/arachnofiles/pages/journal\\_index.htm](http://www.selc.ed.ac.uk/arachnofiles/pages/journal_index.htm)> under the heading Annalisa Lilliu, displays some minor overlapping with this PhD thesis. In particular, for the plot of *Elias Portolu* see page 106; on Deledda’s prose and her employment of direct and indirect discourse cf. pages 142-143; for a discussion of paratextual features see pages 145-146; on word-order inversions, and postponement of the theme of the sentence cf. page 147; on idiomatic expressions see top of page 149).

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Annalisa Lilliu



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This thesis is dedicated to my father, Bellino, and to the memory of my mother, Teresina.

## Abstract

The subject of this thesis is the Italian and British regional novel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It principally focuses on the works of four authors: the Italian writers Grazia Deledda and Giovanni Verga; and the English authors Thomas Hardy and David Herbert Lawrence. Its primary aim is to examine the development of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Italian and British regional fiction, by means of a comparative analysis of selected works by those authors, in the hope of contributing significantly to the critical debate on this fictional sub-genre in the two countries. My hypothesis is that, in spite of chronological differences in the literary developments in these two countries, it is nevertheless possible to identify common trends and conventions between the Italian and the British regional novels, and thus to confirm the existence of the sub-genre.

The novels selected for analysis are: Verga's *I Malavoglia* (1881) and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* (1889); Deledda's *Elias Portolu* (1903) and *Canne al vento* (1913); Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886); Lawrence's *The White Peacock* (1911) and *Sons and Lovers* (1913).

The first chapter of this thesis presents a brief introduction to genre theory and to the issues related to this type of critical approach. The same chapter includes a discussion of the regional novel as a fictional sub-genre in Italy and Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is also in this chapter that the main conventions of this fictional sub-genre are presented, together with the difficulties related to generic categorisation and to the frequent overlapping of various fictional sub-genres within the same work. The four following chapters, organised according to the authors, provide a comparative analysis of the selected novels, which also includes a discussion of the preservation of, or the deviation from, the generic conventions of the regional novel, and any possible interference from other novelistic sub-genres. After a brief introduction to the authors and their relation with regional fiction and fictional genres in general, the analysis generally focuses on the following themes: the historical, social, and economic background of the novels; the geographical setting of the novel and the author's relation to it; the representation of local culture in terms of folklore, customs, and ethnicity; the characters, their role within the local community, and their relation to the setting; the language and style of the novels, in particular the employment of dialectal items and proverbs. The chapter on D. H. Lawrence also includes a paragraph on Lawrence as critic of Hardy, Deledda and Verga. The results of the investigation carried out in the thesis and its contribution to knowledge are analysed in the Conclusion.

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**List of abbreviations**

*A Scots Quair* = *SQ*

*Canne al vento* = *CV*

*Elias Portolu* = *EP*

*I Malavoglia* = *M*

*Mastro-don Gesualdo* = *MdG*

*Sea and Sardinia* = *SS*

*Selected Literary Criticism* = *SLC*

*Sons and Lovers* = *SL*

*Study of Thomas Hardy (and Other Essays)* = *STH*

*The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence* = *CL*

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* = *MC*

*The Return of the Native* = *RN*

*The White Peacock* = *WP*

## Introduction

As the title of this thesis indicates, the subject of my research is the Italian and British regional novel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It principally focuses on the works of four authors, the Italian Grazia Deledda and Giovanni Verga, and the English Thomas Hardy and David Herbert Lawrence. The idea of comparing these four writers was firstly influenced by my previous study of Deledda's regional novel *Elias Portolu* and its translation by Martha King,<sup>1</sup> and by Lawrence's observations on Deledda's works in his Preface to the English translation of her novel *La madre*.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence also associated Deledda with the English writer Thomas Hardy, especially for their relation with their respective native regions, that is, Central-Northern Sardinia and Dorset.<sup>3</sup>

Lawrence's appreciation of Deledda's works and his comparison between the Sardinian writer and Hardy encouraged me to expand my research, which later highlighted the similarities between the two authors, and especially the possible classification of some of their works within the sub-genre of the regional novel. In fact, Lawrence himself often selected his native region, the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire areas, for the setting of his novels. As section V.2 of this thesis will show, he also presented an accurate analysis of Hardy's works in his *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*.<sup>4</sup> Lawrence also compares Deledda to the Italian writer Giovanni Verga in the same essay "*The Mother*, by Grazia Deledda", and discusses Verga's works *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, and "*Cavalleria rusticana*" in *Selected Literary Criticism*.<sup>5</sup> He was also a translator of Verga's novel *Mastro-*

*don Gesualdo*, and of his collection of short stories *Novelle Rusticane* (*Little novels of Sicily*) (1883). He also spent a long time in Sicily.

Therefore, starting from Lawrence's comparison and analysis of Hardy, Deledda and Verga, and also considering Lawrence partly as a regional novelist, the primary aim of my research is to examine the development of the Italian and British regional novel in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by means of a comparative analysis of selected works by those authors. In this way, I hope to contribute significantly to the critical debate on the regional novel as a fictional sub-genre in both countries. My hypothesis is that, in spite of the different chronological development of this sub-genre in these two countries, it may nevertheless be possible to identify common trends and conventions that overcome the national boundaries in both the Italian and the British regional novels of that specific period.

The method of analysis proposed in this thesis also takes into account a generic approach to literature. For this reason, it has been judged necessary to present a brief introduction to genre theory and to the issues related to this specific critical approach in the first chapter, section I.1. The same chapter also presents a discussion of the regional novel as a literary sub-genre in Italy and Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and of its developments and main features according to the leading scholars. It is in this chapter that I introduce the main conventions of this fictional sub-genre, which include: a detailed and accurate representation of a circumscribed local community, which is generally made up of peasants, farmers, shepherds, fishermen, small entrepreneurs



and land-owners; the fundamental role of the setting, which is often rural, and accompanied by an accurate representation of the local landscapes, customs and folkloristic events and often by the contrast between country and city values; the employment of a realistic style and of a 'simple', everyday language, often characterised by dialectal influences at lexical, grammatical and syntactic level.

The following chapters, organised according to the authors, will provide a comparative analysis of selected novels which will discuss the preservation or the variation of the above-mentioned generic conventions and any possible interference from other fictional sub-genres. The analysis will focus on the following themes: the setting and the representation of local culture in terms of geography, topography, folklore, customs and ethnicity in regional fiction; the author and the setting; the characters, their familial relations and their role within the local and native community; style and discourse: the language of the regional novel, and the employment of dialectal features and proverbs.

The novels selected for discussion are: Verga's *I Malavoglia* (1881) and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* (1889); Deledda's *Elias Portolu* (1903) and *Canne al vento* (1913); Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886); Lawrence's *The White Peacock* (1911) and *Sons and Lovers* (1913). This selection, which has been difficult to make and to limit, especially because of Deledda's and Hardy's vast fictional production related to this sub-genre, aims to offer a variety of settings and themes presented in regional novels, while also privileging quality of analysis over quantity. In fact, *Elias Portolu* and *The White Peacock* describe the Sardinian and the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire pastoral

world, including the life of cattle breeders in *The White Peacock*. *Canne al vento*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Mastro Don Gesualdo* primarily focus on agricultural production and on the rise – also by means of flashbacks – and downfall of their respective protagonists. *I Malavoglia* describes the difficulties faced by a Sicilian family of fishermen after the socio-economic and political changes introduced by the Italian Unification, while *Sons and Lovers* focuses on the complicated familial and sexual relationships in the Nottinghamshire mining district. Furthermore, in *Elias Portolu* and *The Return of the Native*, the male protagonists also face the return to their native region after a long period spent away from it, and the consequent difficulties in readjusting themselves to their autochthonous environment. This experience is also shared by 'Ntoni in *I Malavoglia*, while Giacinto, in *Canne al vento*, moves to his mother's native island of Sardinia. Lastly, *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers* also present a discussion of town life versus country life, while in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* country and town coexist harmoniously in Casterbridge.

In conclusion, although the four authors and their works have already been widely analysed and separately compared in the past, a comparative and extended analysis of them has, to my knowledge, never been carried out so far, and should bring to light not only the similarities and differences among these writers and their regional works, but also confirm or dismiss, wholly or in part, the traits of this fictional sub-genre in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Italy and Britain.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Annalisa Lilliu, "The Audience in *Elias Portolu*: The Translation of a Regional Novel," diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The Preface has been reprinted in Lawrence's article "*The Mother By Grazia Deledda*," Lawrence 1955: *Selected Literary Criticism*, 291-295. Regarding the connections between Lawrence and Deledda, cf. Unali 1992: 267-276.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lawrence 1955: 294. Cf. also Contarino 1992: 409-416.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lawrence 1985.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lawrence "*Mastro-Don Gesualdo*, by Giovanni Verga" 270-279 and "*Cavalleria rusticana*, by Giovanni Verga" 279-291 in Lawrence 1955.

## Chapter I: An introduction to genre theory. The origins and developments of the regional novel in Great Britain and Italy

The major reason it proves so difficult to arrive at a simple and satisfactory definition of individual genres or of genre itself, then, is that the concept encompasses so many different literary qualities. (Dubrow 1982: 7)

The definition and classification of the regional novel as a fictional sub-genre does initially not appear particularly easy. Often negatively referred to as the *provincial* or *rural* novel, because of the physical and cultural boundaries generally associated with the concept of *regional*,<sup>1</sup> or assimilated and confused with the *pastoral* novel, its origins, definition and developments raise some interesting questions for the scholar in this field. Moreover, further problems arise if the analysis of this sub-genre focuses on two national literatures such as the Italian and the British, as the title of this thesis indicates. They are, in fact, characterised by a different chronological and thematic development of the novel. Therefore, in this chapter, an introduction to the origins and evolution of the regional novel in Italy and Great Britain, with special focus on the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, will be preceded by a brief presentation of the issues raised by genre theory in the categorisation of the novel and of its numerous sub-genres. The main features of regional fiction, and the possible similarities and differences between Italian and British regional novels will be subsequently identified, and further applied in the analysis of selected regional texts in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

### 1.1 Genre theory

Not only are the definition and classification of a specific literary genre difficult, but also those of genres in general are particularly problematic. In fact, genres develop and evolve historically: new genres are born continually, while others disappear or are assimilated into existing ones, or adopt new features, as also most critics confirm.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in genre theory, the relation between authors, their texts and generic conventions features is essential. Authors, in fact, usually comply to generic conventions willingly, but often choose to challenge established genres by introducing innovative elements to them. As Corti (1997: 153) also explains, by choosing a specific genre, a writer selects a specific interpretation of reality on the level of theme and form. Moreover, as Dubrow's analysis of the relationship between authors and genres also implies, when authors select a specific genre for their works, they are making: a statement on the literary canon, for example by showing their respect for the past (Dubrow 1982: 10); or a criticism of the contemporary literature, by preferring a form that is no longer popular (*ibid.* 13); or a polemical act (*ibid.* 30).

Another important relation is the one between a text and its generic traits, and the readers of the text. For Corti (1997: 154), a literary genre is also the symptom of a culture and of the social status that produces, embraces and diffuses it, and each genre seems to have a specific public or social class as addressee.<sup>3</sup> In fact, as Culler points out,

The function of genre conventions is essentially to establish a contract between writer and reader so as to make certain relevant expectations operative, and thus to permit both compliance with and deviation from accepted modes of intelligibility. (1975: 147)

The role of the educated reader (that is, the “sophisticated reader”, in Kent’s words),<sup>4</sup> is, in my opinion, fundamental in genre theory. He/she can impose the interpretation of a text on the basis of personal knowledge of and expectations from a genre. In relation to this, Kent offers an interesting discussion of three typologies of texts, and of the readers’ reactions to each of them: the so-called ‘automatised texts’, those that are highly conventional and confirm the readers’ generic expectations; the ‘de-formed texts’, which manipulate the readers’ expectations “by syntagmatically foregrounding the formulated conventions of one recognizable dominant genre”; and the ‘epistemological text’, which “vacillates between generic categories, never settling into a dominant generic category”. The latter type questions the readers’ perception of the text and their ability to read it.<sup>5</sup> This classification, and especially the typology of the ‘epistemological text’, will later prove useful in the possible categorisation of the regional novels presented in this thesis, especially where D. H. Lawrence’s works are concerned. Thus, we may agree with Fraiman’s comment that:

genre criticism plays a key role in canon formation both by policing individual categories and by maintaining hierarchical relationships among categories; that it regulates not only which texts we read but also, by alerting us to some elements over others, how we are able to read them. (Fraiman 1993: 2)

It is, however, the evolution and possibly the ‘modernisation’ of genres that seems to interest critics in this field. According to Fowler (1982: 23), for example, it is the very fact that literary works usually modify the genre they are related to that makes a work artistically significant.<sup>6</sup> However, as the same critic points out,



“Every genre, too, has multiple distinguishing traits, which, however, are not all shared by each exemplar” (Fowler 1982: 18). This can be certainly applied to the novel, the genre that most interests us in this thesis. Fowler (1982: 85-86) also argues that novels rarely belong to one genre only, but combine elements of various genres; genres can be also signalled by allusions, titles, opening formulas, and topics (Fowler 1982: 88). Here, Fowler’s terminology appears partly confusing. The novel, in fact, in my opinion, should be considered as a genre *per se*, and its numerous typologies, for example, the psychological novel, the *Bildungsroman*, the detective novel, and the regional novel as its numerous sub-genres, which are often ‘merged’ within the same text. Later in his book, however, Fowler (1982: 122) applies this further subdivision, by explaining that the novel can be divided into many sub-genres, which have some generic coherence but also their own specific features.

In fact, the uncertainties in generic terminology are a first, important aspect of genre theory: as De Meijer (1985: 247) asks, what does the term *genre* refer to, and is there harmony among the various languages in reference to it?<sup>7</sup> This confusion is widespread also among other critics. Fubini (1956: 179), for example, had previously emphasised the evident ambiguity of the concept of genre. According to him, literary genres should be seen as approximate and defective instruments;<sup>8</sup> he also defends the individuality of the poetic work as an autonomous being (1956: 213). The difficulties and confusion raised by the word *genre* and its meaning have also been emphasised by Chamberlain and Thompson

(1998: 2). The latter also claim that the concept of genre – and consequently, genre theory – is still usually “associated with old-fashioned conservative formalism”, despite the new usage of genre by structuralists, the ‘reader response school’, and the ‘cultural materialists’, now merged in the cultural studies approach.<sup>9</sup> In my opinion, an acceptable and appropriate definition of a genre can be the one offered by Corti and translated by Kent (1986: 34): a literary genre is “the place where the individual work enters into a complex network of relations with other works”, and sub-genres include features of the genre and other differentiating and specific ones.<sup>10</sup> Her definition, however, should be implemented by specifying “literary works that share some common characteristics”; otherwise we could risk confusing generic relations with Kristeva’s *intertextuality*, which, as Cuddon (1991: 454) argues, denotes “the interdependence of literary texts, the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it”. Genres in fact classify literary works on the basis of the conventions they share, but also distinguish them from others which do not have those same characteristics.

Furthermore, genre theory has sometimes enjoyed a limited popularity among the various critical approaches to literature, despite its ancient and authoritative origins, and its important role during the Renaissance. According to Fowler (1982: 24), for example, genre theory is often seen as irrelevant, as it fails to correspond to actual literary works. However, in his opinion, genre criticism



“makes an invaluable contribution, by locating the work’s individuality vis-à-vis convention” (Fowler 1982: 262).

A generic approach to the analysis of literature was for example condemned during the romantic period, when, according to Fubini (1956: 213), the individuality of the poetic work as an autonomous being was emphasised. A contrast arose later, with the rise of Naturalism: Naturalism, in fact, focused its criticism not on the single work, but on the class to which it belonged together with others, in order to reconstruct the history of the genre, and possibly, generic laws and their evolution (Fubini 1956: 239-240). For example, the tendency to classify the novel in the late nineteenth century is confirmed but also condemned by Capuana (1898, 1973: 49). In the twentieth century, a generic approach to literature was criticised by Croce in his *Estetica* (1902). His view has been analysed by numerous critics, including De Meijer, Fubini, and Dubrow.<sup>11</sup>

The origins of Croce’s opposition to literary genres can be briefly summarised in the contrast he envisaged between imagination and intuition versus intellect and logic in the process of knowledge acquisition, and especially of artistic creation and interpretation. Croce, in fact, believed that art should be created and experienced at the level of intuition, and that a generic interpretation of a work of art would involve an intellectual and logical response, and therefore distort the very reception of the artistic work.

Although Croce’s influence has been relevant and long-lasting in this field, especially among Italian critics, but also abroad, the importance of genre theory has gradually been reasserted at international level, and as Dubrow also argues,

for example by the neo-Aristotelians (1982: 86-87), the Russian Formalists, the Structuralists, Todorov, Culler, Frye, among German literary critics, and also by 'reader response criticism'.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Kent also discusses theoreticians as different in methodology and outlook as Hirsch, Jauss, Iser, and Derrida, who seem to share the notion that generic perception is crucial to interpretation:<sup>13</sup>

As different as their methodological approaches to interpretation and as different as their assumptions about literature may be, Iser, Jauss, and Hirsch seem to share a fundamental agreement that generic perception forms a primordial moment of literary awareness, and as such, it is one of the preconditions for all literary understanding. Even Jacques Derrida's conception of genre, which is radically antiformalist, acknowledges the importance of the moment of generic perception. (Kent 1986: 149)

In fact, despite Derrida's belief in the instability of language and literature, and therefore in the indeterminacy of the text – something that also Dubrow (1982: 84) highlights, and which indicates Derrida's scant belief in a generic approach – Kent argues that, according to Derrida:

Because 'a text cannot belong to no genre,' to know a genre is to know the text, and to know a text, a reader must know the genre. Of course, this moment of knowing, this moment of generic perception, is exceedingly transitory, but it is nonetheless there. So, even for Derrida, there is a 'law' of genre that constitutes no matter how transitorily a kind of precondition to literary knowledge. Derrida tells us 'there is no genreless text,' and this law is the beginning of all interpretation. (1986: 150)

Finally, De Meijer also mentions other critics who are interested in genre theory and generic approaches and classifications – Hempfer, Genette, Frye and the above-mentioned Fowler –<sup>14</sup> and discusses Corti's semiotic perspective and Segre's similar approach,<sup>15</sup> thus highlighting the variety of opinions on and approaches to this subject.

This brief and incomplete illustration of the evolution of literary genres and of some of the views on generic theory seems to reinforce Fubini's view that definitions based on genres will always be provisional and approximate (1956: 257), and therefore, not worth applying. However, any approach to literary works is arguably partial and not definitive, and offers continuous and open room for debate and dispute. In the case of the four authors that will be discussed in the following chapters, it can be anticipated that the collocation of their selected works within the sub-genre of the regional novel must also be integrated with the discussion of those conventions that are external to this specific sub-genre.

### *1.2 The regional novel in Great Britain: a first definition, origins, and developments*

The British regional novel has been variously defined by its critics in the past. If we compare the numerous definitions available, we may summarise the main conventions of this sub-genre in the following terms: it is a fictional work in which the attention is focused on a specific area, which is often rural or provincial, and on its inhabitants and their lives, who are the protagonists of the story.<sup>16</sup> To this general definition, on which critics usually agree, most of them add specific considerations, leading to further debate on this fictional sub-genre. For example, the English regional writer Phyllis Bentley considers the regional novel as a derivation, a sub-type, of the so-called 'national novel', and claims that it is characterised by the uniqueness of that specific region, which distinguishes it from all the others (1941: 7). Similarly, for Brinkley, the focus of the regional

novel is on the peculiarities of the specific region portrayed, usually a place that the author knows well, and especially on the local society and the effects of that specific environment on the characters' lives and the community in general.<sup>17</sup>

Snell, the major contemporary expert on the British regional novel, emphasises the realistic dialogue (which is often associated with the use of the local dialect for representational purposes and to mark the characters' idiolect and speech), the attempted verisimilitude of this fictional sub-type, and the working-class or middle-class origins of its characters.<sup>18</sup> In his more recent book, Snell also extends his definition to include urban settings. According to him regional fiction is:

fiction that is wholly or largely set in a particular geographical region, and which purports to describe or use recognisable and distinctive features of the life, customs, language, dialect or other aspects of that area's culture and people. I also include fiction that conveys a strong sense of local geography, topography or landscape, whether that be rural or urban. Many regional novels contain all these elements; others may be particularly strong in a representation of one or a few apparently regional features. (Snell 2002: 2)

These definitions, taken together, also present the most remarkable conventions of this fictional sub-genre. In particular, the author's relation with the area he/she describes and analyses, and the relation between the characters and their native or local region – including their actions of remaining in or leaving it – seem to me particularly worth investigating. Even more so is the concept of *region*. In fact, regional writers might identify it with a geographical, political, a historical, or even an economic entity, and oppose it to other regions and to the whole *nation*. Otherwise, they might select a localised community – for example, a village, or even a group of hamlets, as a symbol of it, and discuss it in relation to the entire outside world, including other nearby communities. These subjects will

be discussed in detail in the next chapters of this thesis, where the support of textual analysis and biographical information on the authors should help to provide a valuable discussion of these themes.

As the origins and history of the regional novel as a literary genre in Great Britain are concerned, they are usually identified with Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), and subsequently with Walter Scott's novels, which can be regarded as historical novels with a strong regional dimension.<sup>19</sup> In accordance with this view, Snell claims that the emergence of this literary genre was accompanied by a growing interest in a "more realistic portrayal of regional, topographical, economic and cultural traits",<sup>20</sup> which further developed with Edgeworth's successor, Walter Scott.<sup>21</sup> According to Draper, regionalism had in fact its origins in the late eighteenth century as a response to the Industrial Revolution, which brought with it great changes and inevitable losses, and consequently the desire to preserve the essential regional or local human values.<sup>22</sup>

However, once more, there is disagreement on the 'founders' of this fictional sub-genre: some critics propose other writers as the creators of regional fiction. Cuddon also includes John Galt's novels among the earliest regional novels (1991: 783), while Drabble and Stringer (1996: 485), who also mention Edgeworth, Galt, and Scott as the precursors of the regional novel, highlight the more accurate representation of gradually more limited localities in the works of Mrs Gaskell and George Eliot just before 1850, or in those by the Brontës, and later even more in those of Kingsley, Blackmore, Hardy, Jefferies, Stevenson,



Barrie, Bennett, and D. H. Lawrence. Draper also comments on some of these writers, and adds that Gaskell, the Brontës, Eliot, and Hardy resisted the pressures of the powerful 'centre', and "helped to cultivate in the minds of their readers the notion of a regional/provincial counterbalance to its homogenising influence" (Draper 1989: 3).

Other scholars, like Gilmour, propose the later period of the 1840s for the origins of the English regional novel, when the introduction of new means of communications, such as the train, made travellers (and writers) aware of "living in a land of regions" (1989: 53).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Bentley (1941: 14) considers Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) as the first great regional novel. In fact, like Gilmour, she does not mention either Edgeworth or Scott, possibly because their regional fiction dealt with Ireland and Scotland respectively, and not with England, and focused on more historical themes. Finally, another scholar, Cavaliero (1978: 66), traces the origins of regional literature back to Radcliffe's Gothic novels and Scott's regional historical ones, and like Gilmour, links the development of regional fiction to nineteenth-century industrialisation and new transport systems, which improved contacts between different areas of the country, and made people, and especially writers, more aware of their regions.

This variety of opinions demonstrates how lively the debate on British regional fiction has been throughout the twentieth century, and how this field remains open to further discussion and investigation nowadays. It seems in fact difficult to agree on a specific date of origin of this fictional genre, and on a single author as its creator; and the origins of any genre are always hard to determine. In

spite of these different critical views, however, the origins of the regional novel could probably be found, in my opinion, in the early nineteenth-century works of Edgeworth and Scott. This was a phase in which these novel types could actually be considered more 'national' than 'regional'. Later, the more localised setting presented in the works of the mid- and late nineteenth century, where the emphasis was also put on the economic changes that affected the various British regions, in particular the rural ones, certainly gave a decisive regional connotation to this fictional type.

As regards the historical evolution of the regional novel, according to Snell (1998: 27), after its early days at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it developed especially during the late nineteenth century, when there was an expansion of the reading public, and also a growing general European interest in local and regional history. It was then affected by a decrease during the First World War, a period, like the Second World War, of nationalistic emphasis, and by a new rise around the 1930s. Before and after the Second World War, there was some stability in the production of regional fiction. In more recent years, however, this novel type has benefited from a new increase in publication, related to the development of the so-called 'urban novel'.<sup>24</sup> According to Snell, regional fiction is in constant development, as the trends of the production of regional novels in Britain demonstrate, as well as the selection of regional themes among various contemporary writers.<sup>25</sup>

Another scholar, Leclaire, discusses in detail the three main periods into which the British regional novel might be divided: during the first one, 1800-1830, the regional novel can be considered more national than properly regional; the second one, 1830-1870, witnesses a more narrow localisation, but not yet consciously regional; the third one, from 1870 onwards, presents the regional novel proper. More specifically, according to Leclaire, the period 1870-1895 can be regarded as that of picturesque regionalism; the phase 1890-1914 as romantic and sentimental regionalism; that of 1900-1925 as realistic and naturalistic regionalism; from 1920 until World War II as interpretative regionalism; and finally, after World War II, as the so-called present-day regionalism (Leclaire 1954: 12-13). Thus, 'the regional novel proper – after 1870', the one that mostly interests us for the purposes of this research, is the one in which writers, familiar with the area they were describing, could either aim at picturesque or realistic descriptions, or include the influence of the past, while still analysing human problems (Leclaire 1954: 121). This, as we shall see in chapter IV of this thesis, seems also to confirm the nostalgic, yet realistic descriptions of Wessex or Dorset, which can be found especially among Hardy's novels.

Furthermore, Bentley (1941: 13), who sees the period 1840-1940 as the golden age of the English regional novel, also believes that the lack of homogeneity within England – in terms of culture, geography (landscapes) and so on – favoured the rise of regional fiction. In fact, because of this diversification within the United Kingdom, English literature is very rich in regional literature. This 'regional diversification' within the nation, as we shall see later in this



chapter, is also a characteristic of Italy, where, unlike England, the *region* has been a political unit – or part of it – in the past, and continues to be so at present.<sup>26</sup>

The birth and subsequent rise of the regional novel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is also related, in Bentley's opinion, to the improvement of the communication services among the different regions of the United Kingdom. She claims that numerous regional novels were produced in the 1880s and 1890s (1941: 28), and that the subsequent developments of regional fiction in the early twentieth century showed the stabilisation of the genre, and the production of several admirable examples of regional novels (1941: 33).

As a matter of fact, other elements that have probably favoured the development and rise of regional fiction in the nineteenth century are the change from a rural to an urban society, and the related socio-economic changes of the time (Williams 1970: 9-11). Hardy, in particular, has been often mentioned as one of the late-nineteenth-century writers who witnessed and described the disappearance of traditional rural life. Furthermore, the analysis of the local community is certainly a fundamental aspect of British and Italian regional fiction, and according to Raymond Williams, it is also the most important element in Victorian fiction, which continued until the Edwardian Age and later.

In a profoundly changing and uncertain world, as that of those times, affected by the rapid transformations within the urban and industrial contemporary society, the concept of the *community*, the relations among its inhabitants, and the way they saw their community and the outside world were investigated by writers. As Raymond Williams explains (1970: 13), society then

was not just a code to measure, an institution to control, a standard to define or to change. It was a process that entered lives, to shape or to deform; a process personally known but then again suddenly distant, complex, incomprehensible, overwhelming.

The English novelists of the mid-nineteenth century went back to the Industrial Revolution, the democratic reform,<sup>27</sup> and the movement from country to town. The fact that individuals could no longer be fully known through their relationships, and that people were fundamentally unknowable, deeply affected the novel. According to Raymond Williams, therefore, what novelists faced was the so-called 'crisis of the knowable community'.<sup>28</sup> This theme, as we shall see in chapters IV and V, is a central one in the works of Hardy and Lawrence, as well as in Verga and Deledda. In fact, it takes the form of the contrast between the local community, which often represents the region where it is set, and the outside world, which is represented by a town, a city, a metropolis or even a foreign place.

Furthermore, another important feature of regional literature is its relation to nationalism, which can be seen as a recurrent theme in British regional works. The issue of nationalism seems to have developed after the emergence of the Romantic Movement and the related nationalistic forms, associated with the preservation of local dialects, traditions and folklore (Snell 1998: 45). More recently, the growing development of British regional fiction from the late 1970s and 1980s (Snell 1998: 27) is also correlated with the rise of nationalist movements, particularly in Scotland. In fact, by highlighting the region, the locality, and the cultural traits of a particular area, the author may produce a kind of political declaration, which may also function as a reaction against the

centralised government. This might have created a form of prejudice towards this literary genre, which may be or may have been perceived as ‘aggressive’ and problematic for the national political system. Perhaps, as the Irish poet Seamus Heaney says, “National independence, national identity, national distinctiveness are usually conceived in books before they are carried by the ballot.” (1989: 12).

Thus, it can be concluded that the period immediately preceding the mid-nineteenth century played a key role in the evolution of the British regional novel. In fact, the influence of the Industrial Revolution, the improvement of the communication systems and the consequent social evolution favoured the growing awareness of regional differences and traditions, and promoted a stronger interest in local realities. Moreover, this trend continued and developed throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, and increased especially towards the turn of the century, assisted by the changes in landscape and society (especially in the rural areas), by the expansion of the reading public, and by an internationally widespread interest in local and regional history, customs and folklore. The expansion of this novel sub-genre continued in the twentieth century, despite the advent of new literary movements and fictional sub-genres which influenced the evolution of regional literature into more specific novel sub-types, among which the urban novel definitely plays a fundamental role. Despite its successes, the definition and classification of this fictional sub-genre remains controversial. It will be the task of the following chapters to demonstrate and integrate the assumptions contained in this chapter.

### 1.3 *The regional novel in Italy: definition, birth, and developments*

The definition, origins and most important developments of the regional novel in Italy are more disputable than those of the British regional novel. This is especially due to the different historical and literary evolution of the two countries. Moreover, the term *letteratura regionale*, “regional literature”, has strong thematic and temporal affinities with the literary movement of *Verismo*, a form of Realism, and its fictional form, the *veristic* novel. In fact, it can be argued that, among Italian literary critics, the idea and the interpretation of regional literature carries some denigrating connotations. It is as if regional literature or more specifically, regional fiction, could not be evaluated as an ‘independent’ fictional sub-genre in Italy, but must somehow be assimilated to *Verismo*. This is especially so when examining the literary production of the mid to late 1870s and of the 1880s, when this literary movement was at its apex..

A first definition of the Italian regional novel does not, however, diverge much from that of British fiction: it can be described as a realistic type of fiction that represents and analyses the life and customs of a local community (usually based in the countryside and therefore mainly agricultural or pastoral), and which also highlights the contrasts between country life and city life.

As far as the origins of this genre in Italy are concerned, firstly we may say that Italian literature, because of the country’s division in several states until 1870,<sup>29</sup> has a strong tradition of regional and dialectal literature that goes back to the Middle Ages. Therefore, we can talk of Italian regional literatures, which



existed independently before the unification, as Sisca (1970: 63) does by arguing that Italian literature was born “dialectal and regional”.<sup>30</sup> Those regional literatures were forced to merge into a national literature after the unification of the country.

The novel was initially regarded as an inferior literary genre in Italy, as had also occurred initially in other countries. Nevertheless, inspired by the successes of this genre abroad (De Meijer 1997: 220), it was introduced during the Romantic period, encouraged by Foscolo’s *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1802) (De Meijer 1997: 224), and developed especially around the 1820s, with the influence of Scott’s historical novels, the publication of Bazzoni’s *Il Castello di Trezzo* in 1827, and particularly of Manzoni’s first edition of *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*) in the same year (Bertacchini 1964: 5). This genre came to be gradually perceived by literary critics and writers as a new, more modern and popular way to produce literature, and in Manzoni’s case, as a way to discuss moral issues and everyday people’s lives against a realistic historical background.

The historical novel played a fundamental role as the precursor of the regional novel in Italy as well as in Britain. Moreover, in Italy we may add the influence of the *romanzo* and *racconto campagnolo*, “the rustic novel” and “the rustic short story”, which followed the successes of the historical novel, and which were popular in Italy around the 1850s. Influenced by the rustic works of Sand, Balzac and Auerbach, these sub-genres were widespread especially among Northern Italian writers like Carcano, Percoto, and Nievo. The countryside and agriculture were in fact important themes and issues of the time, because of the way they were affected by the rapid changes introduced by capitalism and by the

hegemony of the bourgeoisie throughout Europe. In Italy, the living conditions of Northern Italian rural communities became a common topic in the newspapers, novels and short stories of the time (Bertacchini 1964: 76, 78-79). The Italian economy, we must remember, was still mostly based on agriculture, and especially in the northern areas it showed an increase in productivity from the 1830s until 1848,<sup>31</sup> due to the initiative of the local ruling classes, which were made up of landowners, the middle-class and occasionally aristocrats concerned about the modernisation and improvement of agriculture (De Tommaso 1973: 33-34). By emphasising the good and honest countryside values and traditions against the corrupted city lifestyle, rustic short story writers and novelists tried to discourage the process of urbanisation in Italy, and attempted to persuade the rural classes of their fundamental role in the Italian society of the time. As De Tommaso (1973: 87) says about Carcano's rustic short stories, they never endeavoured to favour a sense of solidarity between urban citizens and countryside dwellers. Percoto also inserted folkloristic elements in her stories, and emphasised the central role of the family that Manzoni had introduced in his *I promessi sposi* (Bertacchini 1964: 89-90). Moreover, for the spirit and the form of her works, she can also be seen as a forerunner of *Verismo*, and as the link between these two realist traditions of nineteenth-century Italy (De Tommaso 1973: 126). The rustic novel and short story thus lead towards a more realistic type of fiction, based on contemporary events and on the political, social, and economic situation.

As regards the relationship between regional literature and realism and the development of the Italian regional novel, Brand explains that what really

characterised the regional novel of the late nineteenth century was its strict relation with realism, and the search for a more faithful description of the world. This led writers to pay more attention to a specific environment and its peculiarities, which distinguished it from other environments or areas. In this way, Brand continues, the regional novel can be seen as the follower of the historical novel, which aspired to a more realistic and truthful temporal and geographical reproduction of the events portrayed (Brand 1989: 3). The same critic (1989: 5-6) also explains that the strong interest in regional literature in Italy that developed at the end of the nineteenth century was caused by the desire and necessity felt by writers and intellectuals to diffuse those local traditions, lifestyles, and problems in order to make the various Italian regions better acquainted one with the other,<sup>32</sup> and to *create* a unified literary canon. In this sense, the existence of a target national audience for this literature even before the actual unification is poignant, as the fact that an Italian unified literary canon had existed for centuries. Therefore, it might be argued that, according to these writers, regional diversity should play an important role in the new, and officially unified Italian literary canon. Brand's interpretation of the success of this fictional sub-genre in late nineteenth-century Italian literature is certainly convincing, and offers a very plausible explanation of the widespread role of this type of fiction in Italy at that specific time. However, the ultimate *unifying* role of regional fiction in late nineteenth-century Italy that Brand highlights seems to contradict a widespread trait among regional writers in general, namely, their aim to distinguish and highlight the differences between their region and the rest of the country for

political *separatist* intents. As we have seen, these were certainly not the aims of the Italian regional writers at the time, for example Verga and Deledda.

Thus, although the *region* might have played an important role in much of the Italian literature of the pre-unification period, it is immediately after the union that we can properly talk of Italian regional fiction, a time when the influence of realism, and the knowledge of places ‘other than the writer’s region’, also promoted the desire to compare the various Italian regions and their traditions, and to *appropriate* them, for political reasons. In fact, the late unification of Italy, and the already mentioned previous existence of several and diversified independent kingdoms, also delayed a full recognition of the different Italian regional literatures within the Italian literary canon, and imposed the unification of the institutions, structures, and traditions throughout the country. In this context, the crisis of the novel of the late nineteenth century could find its only remedy, according to Capuana (1973: 52-53), in the choice of a national, or better, a regional type of fiction: in fact, he claimed that the future of Italian fiction lay in the regional novel.<sup>33</sup>

Capuana’s prediction proved true, and regionalism continued to be relevant within the Italian realistic fiction of the twentieth century. Luti (1964: 276), for example, discusses the dominance of regional fiction at the beginning of the twentieth century, which is due to the lack, in recently unified Italy, of “a coherent social awareness”, that is, the awareness of belonging to a nation which had just been created.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, according to the same critic (1964: 276), the most valid literary achievements are still those that show a regional or provincial character,



but also aim at a national and even European one. Moreover, Luti (1964: 276-277) emphasises the fact that regional authors like Pratesi, Padula, Verga, De Roberto, and Deledda would later influence those twentieth-century Italian novelists who were formed by the inter-war period. According to the same scholar, in spite of the dominant influence of D'Annunzio's works, and the Fascist intent of destroying Verga's coherent regionalism and Svevo's European consciousness, both the latter survived (Luti 1964: 269).

### *1.3.1 The Italian regional novel and its affinity with "veristic" fiction. Regionalism and Southern Italian literature*

An interesting aspect of the development of Italian regional fiction specifically at the end of the nineteenth century is its affinity with the *romanzo verista*, which shares similar themes and characteristics.<sup>35</sup> As we have seen, from around the 1850s Italian novelists and short story writers gave much attention to the regional customs and traditions of the time (Mazzoni 1940: 1040-1041). As a matter of fact, the primary element that influenced the rise and development of *Verismo* and of the *romanzo verista*, and also of regional literature, is the post-unification increase in the representation of local realities, especially Southern Italian ones. The reasons for this phenomenon are once again related to the political and economic situation of post-unification Italy. In fact, after the union, Northern Italy remained more advanced and developed economically than Southern Italy, whose economy was still based mostly on agriculture, and continued to be underdeveloped and retrograde. Secondly, the adoption of a strict political centralism by the Italian administration did not help these more

marginalised areas. In fact, it did not take into account the regional and social differences that existed in the country at that time; on the contrary, it tended to destroy local traditions and lifestyles, as Ferroni (1996: 324-325) argues.

*Verismo*, and consequently the *romanzo* and the *novella verista*, influenced by French Naturalism and Realism, and often associated with these movements,<sup>36</sup> became the voice of these marginalised areas and of their inhabitants, even though it was through the agency of upper-middle class writers. Although *Verismo* is a derivation of Naturalism in its emphasis on a faithful and accurate representation of the real world, some aspects of Naturalism, such as the realistic illustration of pathological cases, are more limited and almost absent in *Verismo*. Moreover, because of the different social, political, and economic development of France and Italy, the selection of the setting and characters is divergent.<sup>37</sup> Italian *veristi* writers also did not aim at modifying or improving the *status quo*: they wanted to present a realistic portrayal of those scarcely-developed areas, detaching themselves not only as writers, but also as narrators of their stories. They offered neither commitment nor active participation in favour of social, political, and economic improvement of those disadvantaged regions, and resigned themselves to the fatalism of history.

*Verismo* developed from around the late 1870s, and flourished until approximately 1890. It is at the same time that many influential Italian regional writers also produced their most important works, or made their first steps in the literary world: the Sicilian Giovanni Verga (1840-1922) and Luigi Capuana (1839-1915); the Tuscan Renato Fucini (1843-1921) and Mario Pratesi (1842-

1921); the Neapolitan Federico De Roberto (but of Sicilian origin) (1861-1927) and Matilde Serao (1857-1927); and the Sardinian Grazia Deledda (1871-1936). These writers promoted the search for a faithful and realistic representation of local realities, especially their native towns or regions, in terms of life, customs, folklore, language, and dialect; that is, every aspect that contributed to the portrayal of local life. However, as Brand (1989: 8) explains, although the setting of regional novels is local, regional writers do not simply try to attract attention to what is specifically distinctive of their region; they often also *use* the local setting in order to illustrate the universal human condition. The *region* thus becomes a metaphor for the entire world. Obviously, and as already established, while the *Verista* movement ended in the late nineteenth century, Italian regional fiction continued to play an important influential role, still related to the contemporary political and historical issues, especially at the time of the Second World War with Neo-Realism.

Verga, Capuana, and De Roberto were also the major representatives of *Verismo*. Therefore, we could say that in those authors, with the possible exception of De Roberto, who also elaborated the historical novel in a regionalist way, their regionalism had a profound impact on their belonging to *Verismo*, especially in the selection of the themes and settings of their novels.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, it can be argued that the affinity between the regional novel and the *romanzo verista* is also due to their concurrent, almost simultaneous development from the late 1870s. A stylistic feature that may help to distinguish the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Italian regional novels

from the *romanzo verista* is, in my opinion, the role assigned by the latter to the narrator. In fact, although regional fiction is realistic and based on the accurate representation and analysis of a specific local community as *verista* fiction is, the former is still often characterised by an omniscient narrator, who frequently illustrates and comments on the customs and traditions of that specific community, among other matters. The latter instead prescribes the canon of the impersonality of the narrator: narratorial comments and interventions should be banned from the text, and only the characters should be allowed to represent their world 'in their own words', or in those of their community. This approach, however, is not always successful. Occasionally, in fact, an external narratorial voice survives in the texts. Regional fiction is not specifically concerned about the role of the narrator. The narrator's impersonality is not one of the prescribed conventions of the genre, and often, as for example in many of Deledda's and Hardy's novels, it is through the narrative voice that the author conveys specific and detailed background information on culture-specific elements and historical facts.

Furthermore, like Deledda and Serao, Verga, Capuana and De Roberto were also Southern Italian novelists, an element that leads us to a second association, that of regional literature, *Verismo*, and Southern Italian literature.<sup>39</sup> Sicily in particular, Verga's and Capuana's native land, appeared resistant to a national integration because of its archaic background and independent aspirations. Those writers felt the need to leave their land, but once they had experienced life in the



more modern and stimulating intellectual environment of Florence and Milan, they acknowledged their origins and wrote extensively about them,<sup>40</sup> as Deledda did with Sardinia. They *reassessed* the local realities of their youth, and tried to understand and foreground them. The provincial world, which was underdeveloped, static and focused on an archaic past, thus strikes the attention of many writers of the time. This also happens initially in non-southern authors like Fogazzaro, whose first literary interests were naturalistic, and partially regional, but who later opted for more Decadent themes.

Therefore, we can say that from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, with the very few exceptions of Fucini and Pratesi, some of the Italian regional authors were not only active members of *Verismo*, but also of Southern origin. Deledda, as we will see more in detail in the chapter of this thesis dedicated to her, can be considered a borderline case: in fact, she is initially influenced by *Verismo* and Romanticism, while later she becomes more interested in decadent and psychological themes, and the setting of her works develops into a less identifiable one (see, for example, *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario*, *Il paese del vento*).

#### *1.4 The British and the Italian regional novel: a first comparison*

As this introduction to the regional novel has illustrated, some common but also distinct features characterise this literary sub-genre in Italy and Britain. Firstly, although the origins of this fictional form in the two countries appear to be slightly different because of the dissimilar historical evolution of the two nations,

it seems plausible that they both found inspiration from the evolution of the historical novel, which developed, in regional fiction, into works characterised by a more circumscribed setting and a more contemporary background. While in Britain the regional novel of the mid-nineteenth century overran other important fictional sub-genres such as the social novel of the Victorian age, in Italy it was preceded by the *romanzo* and *racconto campagnolo*, the rustic novel and short story, which certainly influenced the regional novel in terms of its preferred agricultural or pastoral setting, and its representation of countryside people and communities. Moreover, the apex of regional literature in both countries can be found towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. This was a period of social and economic changes and innovations in Great Britain, and also of a political type in post-unification Italy. In Britain, however, the mid-nineteenth century 'laid the foundations' of the later successes of this sub-genre.

Furthermore, an important element that characterises the Italian regional novel of the late nineteenth century is its similarity with its contemporary *romanzo verista*. Although British regional fiction may sometimes appear to overlap with other fictional sub-genres like the pastoral or the rural novel, the Italian regional novel and the *romanzo verista* are related and almost indistinguishable in their themes, settings, and analysis of local, circumscribed communities. Even if we may consider this only as a 'temporal affinity', a distinguishing feature may also be found in the role of the narrator, which is more



flexible in the regional novel, and more ‘impersonal’ and ‘neutral’ in the case of the *romanzo verista*.

Moreover, the majority of late nineteenth-century Italian regional writers were not only active members of *Verismo*, but also of southern origin. This element – the belonging of regionalist writers to a specific area of the country – is not shared by the British. Among them, in fact, there is no prevalence for example of southern or northern writers: those who are originally from rural and working-class areas, and analyse these societies and communities, are the ones who prevail.

Lastly, as regards the theme of regional fiction, it seems that British authors felt the need to display a social reality that was undergoing rapid transformations, with the mechanisation of agricultural production, and the rapid expansion of the railway system. Sometimes they also associated the representation of the local area with nationalistic vindication and diversification, but more often it was the contrast between the rural and the urban world – country versus the city – that was exemplified. The country, as Raymond Williams says, in fact, has usually been associated with “a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue” (1975: 9), but also as a backward, retrograde and limited place. The city, instead, has carried the idea of “an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light” (Williams 1975: 9), but also of ambition and noise. Despite the fundamental transformations in the rural world that took place in Britain over the last two centuries – for example the introduction of agrarian capitalism after the Industrial Revolution, and the decreasing primary role of domestic agriculture during the

imperialistic phase, because of the imported agricultural products of the colonies (Williams 1975: 10) – the old idealised image of the country persisted and probably continues to exist nowadays, thus maintaining the dichotomy of ‘country’ versus ‘city’. This idealised representation of the country also contributed to the development of nostalgic feelings among authors like Hardy and D. H. Lawrence.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the regional novel might be understood as a form of nostalgia.

On the other hand, the image of Italy that is often represented and enhanced in the Italian regional novels of the time usually highlights the imbalances in the development of the country, its past and especially the difficult background of some regions, combined with their exoticism and primitive and uncorrupted natural beauties. In fact, Italian regional writers chose to represent their native regions in terms of their poverty, their isolation, their traditional and sometimes old-fashioned views, their social problems, and their resignation before the newly created central political power that kept ignoring their needs (or even before a ‘cruel fate’ that seemed to rage against them). It is therefore a contrast between the *region*, especially as a political and geographical unit, and the *nation* that is highlighted. Moreover, it can be hypothesised, at this stage, that the representation of the local folklore is also a key feature of both the Italian and the British regional novel, as well as more generally the faithful rendition of the local reality.

The next chapters will develop the comparison between Italian and British regional novels by the authors Verga, Deledda, Hardy, and Lawrence, and they will integrate the definitions and classifications provided so far. Special attention

will be given to the analysis of the setting, the local culture, the characters, the style and discourse, the themes of the novels, and to the evolution of this fictional sub-genre from the works of the late nineteenth-century writers Verga and Hardy to the early twentieth-century writers Deledda and Lawrence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In fact, the terms *provincial* and *rural* are often employed with a negative connotation, to affirm the inferior status of this fictional type if compared to more prominent ones: cf. Draper 1989: 4: “‘Provincial’ is a term which is often used slightly, [...] but ‘regional’ seems to attract no such derogatory usage. This is perhaps because it carries with it none of the hierarchically subordinate implications of ‘provincial’. ‘Regional’ suggests a division of a larger unit, but without the larger being necessarily dominant. It is at once a more neutral term and a more welcome one than ‘provincial’, and is generally free from the imputation of narrowness which is often implicit in the use of ‘provincial’.” Gilmour 1989: 51 also discusses this issue.

<sup>2</sup> For example, cf. Thomashevsky 1978: 53.

<sup>3</sup> Corti, who applies a semiotic perspective, identifies two types of investigation applied in genre criticism: the former is of an abstract, a-temporal and deductive nature, the latter of a historical diachronic and inductive one (Corti 1997: 151). Kent’s analysis of generic classification, and readers’ expectations, is also mostly based on the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of genres: cf. Kent 1986: 15 and 146.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kent 1986: 19: “A naïve reader would be someone who has yet to internalize the generic conventions that would allow her to identify any text as a specific genre. A sophisticated reader would be someone who recognizes the conventions of a large number of genres. Between the two extremes of the naïve and the sophisticated readers would be scattered readers with varying degrees of reading competency.”

<sup>5</sup> All quotations Kent 1986: 142; also cf. 145 and 147.

<sup>6</sup> Fowler sees the novel as a *kind*.

<sup>7</sup> De Meijer 1985: 247. For example, in Post-Crocian Italian culture, ‘genre’ refers to both epic, tragedy and lyric, and to the novel, the sonnet, drama, etc.: De Meijer 1985: 247-248. For De Meijer’s theory on genres (which are constituted by modes – enunciative and semantic ones) cf. 1985: 253-254 and 275 (genres are often identified with semantic modes).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Fubini 1956: 147 continuing 148, also 156. This idea is also found in Croce (Fubini 1956: 251): in *Per una critica moderna*, Croce demonstrates the instrumental and not substantial character of genres, a view, as we have seen, shared by Fubini himself.

<sup>9</sup> For the quotation, cf. Chamberlain and Thompson 1998: 2, other comments 3.

<sup>10</sup> Corti 1997: 156: “Il genere letterario, come si è accennato all’inizio, può definirsi *il luogo dove un’opera entra in una complessa rete di relazioni con altre opere*”. Cf. also Corti 1997: 159 on sub-genres: “Va inoltre tenuta presente l’esistenza di sottogeneri, cui appartengono tratti del genere e altri propri, differenziali; processi di filiazione, dunque, con sviluppi omogenei.”

<sup>11</sup> Cf. De Meijer 1985: 245; Fubini 1956: especially 243-245 and also 245-248; and Dubrow 1982: 83-84.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Dubrow 1982: 85. On Formalists 90; on Structuralists 92; on Todorov 93-94; on Culler’s *Structuralist Poetics* 95-96; 98-103 on Frye (and his *Anatomy of Criticism*), on German literary critics 103; and also 107 and ff. until 114 on ‘reader response criticism’. Among the Formalists, Thomashevsky’s theory of ‘the dominant devices’ is worth mentioning (see Thomashevsky 1978: 52). Thomashevsky 1978: 55, however, believes that “no firm logical classification of genres is possible. Their demarcation is always historical, that is to say, it is correct only for a specific moment of history”.

<sup>13</sup> On these theoreticians, also cf. Kent 1986: 147-150.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. De Meijer 1985: 248-249 on Hempfer and 249 on Genette. For his opinion on Fowler’s approach cf. 251.

<sup>15</sup> De Meijer 1985 discusses Segre’s article “Generi” in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, 256, and Segre’s earlier essay *Le strutture narrative e la storia*, 257.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Cuddon 1991: 782-783 and Drabble and Stringer 1996: 485.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Brinkley 1968: especially 157. For a discussion of the relationship between the authors and the region they describe, or the relationship among the author, the setting, the readership, and the text, or of the readerships, cf. respectively Watson 1989: 34-50, and Snell 1998: 41-44.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Snell 1998: 1, and 32-35 on dialect and rural speech.



<sup>19</sup> However, as Gwynn 1936: 59-60 says, Edgeworth saw Ireland from an English point of view, and unlike Scott in his representation of Scotland, she did not sympathise with the country and the people, and probably did not believe in Ireland as a nation. Fowler 1982: 154 also implies that Scott's historical novels are a derivation of Edgeworth's regional novels.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Snell 1998: 8.

<sup>21</sup> On Scott, cf. Snell 1998: 5.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Draper 1989: 2.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gilmour 1989: 53: "[...] the English regional novel was born in the 1840s out of a comparable recognition of change, in this case an unprecedented change in communications. [...] Railway travel made the metropolitan passenger aware of living in a land of regions, but it also accelerated the process by which those regions were in time standardised to a national norm."

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the rural novel vs. the urban novel, cf. Cavaliero 1977, especially 14-17 and 202, 204-205.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Snell 2002: 5-8 for the trends of the production of regional fiction and 8 for the regionalism in contemporary authors.

<sup>26</sup> Obviously, if this discourse is extended to the whole of the United Kingdom, the idea of the *region*, as for example in the case of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England, certainly carries strong political and even nationalistic and separatist connotations.

<sup>27</sup> Although not explained in Williams, this was probably the 1832 electoral reform.

<sup>28</sup> Regarding 'the exploration of the community' from Dickens to Lawrence, cf. Raymond Williams 1970: 11-16. For 'the crisis of the community', cf. especially 16.

<sup>29</sup> In fact, the complete union, with the only exception of Trento, Trieste and Istria, was sanctioned by the proclamation of Rome as capital of Italy in 1870 and not in 1861.

<sup>30</sup> Similarly in Quartermaine (A.A.V.V. 1989: 1), and also in Asor Rosa 1989: 7.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. De Tommaso 1973: 33.

<sup>32</sup> Brand 1989: 5-6 also highlights the opposition to the diffusion of regional literature among those who aimed at emphasising the similarities (and not the differences) among the various Italian regions, for the creation of a unified country.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Capuana 1973: 52-53: "Il romanzo, probabilmente, se vorrà e potrà rimanere romanzo, non si metterà a servizio di questa o quell'idea, di questo o quel sistema; continuerà a sviluppare il suo organismo adoperando sempre meglio il metodo impersonale, divenendo sempre più nazionale, anzi sempre più regionale, per dare alle sue creazioni la stessa varietà e ricchezza delle creazioni della Natura. E allora non si parlerà più di crisi né di malattie ma di pienezza di salute".

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Luti 1964: 276: "Ma la realtà italiana di quegli anni è diversa: non esiste ancora una coerente coscienza sociale, le nuove esperienze si svolgono e si affermano nei limiti della realtà regionale italiana. Non sarà quindi un caso che le prove più valide della narrativa italiana del primo novecento nascano nelle singole regioni italiane e abbiano un tipico carattere provinciale anche quando si tenti di risalire dalla regione alla nazione, e da questa all'esperienza europea, come intese fare il movimento verista in Italia, da Cameroni a Capuana, da Verga al De Roberto."

<sup>35</sup> Reference to the Italian novel and fiction in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century can be found in Forti. On *Verismo* and regionalism cf. Momigliano 1955: 556. On *Verismo* and regionalism in Sardinia cf. Pirodda 1996: 673-685.

<sup>36</sup> On the relationship between Realism and *Verismo* cf. Amici 1966 chapters I and II. About the difference between Naturalism and *Verismo*, cf. Asor Rosa 1978: 2-3. For the same distinction, also cf. Ferroni 1996: 403-404. Also cf. Rossi 1978: 102 and also the various articles included in A.A.V.V. 1988 (e.g., among others, Vitilio Masiello, "Gli studi sul naturalismo italiano", vol. I, 21-38, and Francesco Nicolosi, "Naturalismo e verismo: concordanze e divergenze", vol. II, 599-613).

<sup>37</sup> While in France naturalistic and realistic novelists chose to represent the life of the inhabitants of urban and suburban areas, usually factory workers, *veristi* writers selected regional, provincial, countryside areas and villages and their inhabitants, usually farmers, peasants, and shepherds instead. Cf. Frassica 1992: 19. For the 'regional colour' of *Verismo*, cf. Momigliano 1955: 555.

<sup>38</sup> Debenedetti, however, highlights the fact that in Italy social conflicts are accompanied by regional conflicts (South versus North and vice versa), and that *Verismo* took the shape of the

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regional novel, as a form of protest and denunciation of depressed areas. Moreover, against Russo, he argues that the selection of the provincial theme was not specific of *Verismo*, but it was borrowed from the French Naturalism, and even more from Balzac. Cf. Debenedetti 1976: 44 and 361 respectively.

<sup>39</sup> On the Southern Italian novel cf. Loriggio 1985: 713-729.

<sup>40</sup> On Verga's and Capuana's 'literary exiles', cf. Di Pietro 1974: 377. On Sicilian literature, and on Verga in particular, cf. Russo 1981: 289-307.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Raymond Williams 1975: 10-11. Williams also examines the evolution of regional literature in the twentieth century. In particular, regional fiction brought forward the representation of natural events, which were also often linked to the description of human relationships and love. Moreover, in its accounts of country life and habits, it contributed to the development of folkloristic studies. Lastly, some regional novels dealt with "the uses and the abuses of the land", and with the threats to the natural world. Cf. Williams 1975: 297. Quotation: *ibid.*



## Chapter II: Giovanni Verga and regional fiction

Il peggio, disse infine Mena, è spatriare dal proprio paese, dove fino i sassi vi conoscono, e dev'essere una cosa da rompere il cuore il lasciarseli dietro per la strada. (*M*, Chapter XI, 172)<sup>1</sup>

### II.1 Verga's literary career

Giovanni Verga was born in Catania in 1840. His father was a wealthy landowner of aristocratic origins, and his mother was a member of the *Catanese* bourgeoisie (Cattaneo 1963: 10). His studies, carried out under the supervision of Antonino Abate, a Sicilian patriot and author of some romantic poems and novels, favoured his appreciation of nineteenth-century French novels by Dumas and Sue, and of Italian patriotic works. He studied Law for three years, but he later left university to focus on writing.

During the first stages of his literary career Verga was influenced by the sub-genres of the historical and romantic novels that he also adopted for his first works: *Amore e patria* (1856-57, but unpublished in his lifetime); *I carbonari della montagna* (1861-62), set in Calabria in Murat's time (Cattaneo 1963: 30); and *Sulle lagune* (1863), which is set in Venice during the Italian *Risorgimento*, and shows the features of the epistolary novel in its second part. However, the historical novel was by that time already outdated. Verga's choice of this sub-genre, according to Petronio (1990: 102), highlights the limits of the provincial literary background in which Verga's education took place. In 1865 Verga left Sicily for the first time to go to Florence, where he moved in 1869. Florence was the new Italian capital from late 1864 until 1870, and during that time it became

one of the most prominent cultural and literary centres in Italy. During those years, Verga produced the almost autobiographical novel *Una peccatrice* (1866) and the sentimental and epistolary one *Storia di una capinera* (1871), which was acclaimed by the public and the critics; in fact, the latter saw in it 'a social thesis' against the sacrifice of young women to monastic life. In late 1872 Verga had moved to Milan, where he stayed for approximately twenty years, until 1893. Milan was the leading cultural and literary centre at the time, and Verga had occasion to meet the most eminent Italian writers of this period in Clara Maffei's and Vittoria Cima's famous *salotti letterari milanesi*. Verga published other melodramatic, sentimental and 'bohemian' works such as *Eva* (1873), *Tigre reale*, and *Eros* (both 1875), in which some episodes describe the elegant Florentine life experienced by the writer (Cattaneo 1963: 51 and 154). Afterwards, influenced by the French realists and naturalists, he explored not only different settings, like the ones that he could find in his native Sicily, but also more objective themes and a new, more essential and bare narrative technique, which enabled the writer to represent the local community without the idyllic or sentimental aspects that characterised some of the rustic fiction of the 1850s. This is also related to the more scientific and objective approach that characterised both Naturalistic and Realist (*Verista*) fiction. Unlike the French Naturalists, however, Verga did not believe in the 'civil and social role of the writer': that is, he did not assume that literature and writers could contribute to the improvement of society and civilisation (Romano 1983: 13). In fact, he saw the writer as a solitary witness of the degrading conditions of his society: in this case, the Sicilian one.

An important work of this phase is the short story “Nedda” (1874), later re-published in *Vita dei campi* (1880), which focuses on the theme of financial and social hardship among the Sicilian lower classes. “Nedda” describes the unhappy and tragic experiences of a Sicilian olives’ harvester, and also anticipates Verga’s later realist and regionalist works of the 1880s. In this short-story, in fact, the protagonist’s poverty and tragedy can be associated with the Malavoglias’. However, as style is concerned, the omniscient narrator that will become intermingled with the characters later in *I Malavoglia* (1881) is still present in “Nedda”, and the protagonist’s portrait is similar to the *femmes fatales* found in *Eva* and *Tigre reale* (Cattaneo 1963: 155). From 1875,<sup>2</sup> Verga worked on *Il ciclo dei Vinti*, initially known as *La Marea*, a cycle inspired by Darwin’s theories of the evolution of the species. This cycle aimed at depicting the struggle for life that the poor, the middle-class and the aristocracy faced in different ways. As is widely known, this cycle should have included four novels apart from *Padron ’Ntoni*, which was published in 1881 under the revised title *I Malavoglia: Mastro-don Gesualdo*, firstly published in serial instalments in *La Nuova Antologia* in 1888 and as a book in 1889; *La Duchessa delle Gargantàs*, later known as *La Duchessa di Leyra* (begun in 1896, Cattaneo 1963: 288); *L’onorevole Scipioni*; and *L’uomo di lusso*. However, only the first chapter and a brief fragment of the second of *La Duchessa di Leyra* were published. The reasons for this failure are various: among them, critics usually identify a possible lack of motivation or inspiration or self-confidence in the author, the difficulties of adapting upper classes themes and settings to the impersonality canon, and the gradual

overcoming of the naturalist and realist themes by more decadent ones in the early twentieth century.

In 1883 Verga published another collection of short stories, *Novelle rusticane*, which, according to Cattaneo (1963: 236), anticipates some of the best pages of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* in the stylistic elaboration and in some of the characters' portraits. While the themes of *Vita dei campi* are mainly the poverty, familial betrayals, jealousy and revenge experienced by the Sicilian protagonists, those of *Novelle Rusticane* are more related to *la roba*, "property", and to the acquisition of wealth and social status.

Verga had also previously returned to Sicily and to the topics of unfaithfulness in marriage and revenge in *Il marito di Elena* (1882), a novel that did not completely satisfy the author. Verga had also analysed the wretched lives of the Milanese proletariat in the short story collection *Per le vie* (1883), which anticipated the less successful one *Drammi intimi* (1884), and partially returned to Sicilian settings in the other collection *Vagabondaggio* (1887), which recalls characters already presented in previous works: Nanni Lasca, in "Vagabondaggio", reminds the reader of 'Ntoni Malavoglia in his desire to explore the world in order to improve his economic status. The theme of the preservation of one's property before death recurs in "Nanni Volpe", which thus resembles the previous short-story "La roba", and anticipates the same *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. Another subject discussed in this collection is once again the passionate and jealous temperament of many Sicilians, which is often emphasised in the violence and trials portrayed at the end of the works, as in "Un processo",



“Il bell’Armando”, and “Il segno d’amore”. Cattaneo describes *Vagabondaggio* as the most heterogeneous of Verga’s works until then, because of the various social levels and character typology represented in the collection (Cattaneo 1963: 254).

After the publication of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* in 1889, the love affairs of the noble woman Ginevra are the key subject of the other collection *I ricordi del Capitano d’Arce* (1891), which according to Cattaneo (1963: 269), highlights Verga’s conventional and emphatic modes, and the general mediocrity of his works whenever he returned to upper class characters. The theme of ‘life as theatre’ concludes Verga’s career as short-story writer in *Don Candeloro e C.i* (1894).

Verga also adapted some of his short stories for the theatre, for example “Cavalleria rusticana”, “La lupa” and “In portineria”. Among them, *Cavalleria rusticana*, taken from *Vita dei campi*, set to music by Mascagni, and performed for the first time in 1884, was later to become his major theatrical success (Cattaneo 1963: 239). In relation to this work, Verga faced several trials against the publisher Sonzogno and the composer Mascagni for the copyright of *Cavalleria rusticana* in the 1890s, which continued into the new century after another musical adaptation of Verga’s short story by Domenico Monleone (Cattaneo 1963: 267). Verga also felt disappointed and disillusioned by his “continental experience”: he had not reached a great success and consequently found refuge in his literary “stubborn and haughty silence” (Cattaneo 1963: 271). Moreover, the writer’s nostalgia for his native Sicily made Catania his ideal place to live (Cattaneo 1963: 270): Verga moved there in 1893, where he stayed until

his death (apart from some short stays in Milan and Rome). After the turn of the century, in fact, Verga became less and less inclined to writing, and remained in Sicily to look after his properties, thus also showing his own attachment to *la roba*, similar to the one showed by his characters (Cattaneo 1963: 268). From 1918, a new revived interest for the writer gradually developed, and found expression not only in some articles and books on him, but also in the celebrations for his eightieth birthday in 1920 (Cattaneo 1963: 340 and 343-344). Verga died in Catania in 1922.

As this brief introduction to Verga's literary career has shown, it could be argued that the Sicilian writer demonstrated his versatile interest in different literary genres – especially the novel and the short-story, but also the play, in his theatrical works and adaptations. According to Debenedetti (1976: 46), Verga, throughout his career, chose as the topic of his works those that were more popular among the public and literary circles, and he borrowed from the French also for his 'society' novels (Debenedetti 1976: 68). However, it is with his realist and regional works that his major contributions to Italian fiction and to the national literary canon are to be found, especially for the thematic and the stylistic innovations that they offered. His original input, however, was unfortunately not welcomed by many contemporary critics and by the public, especially in the case of the groundbreaking novel *I Malavoglia*, and possibly influenced the author's return to a more traditional narrative form, as for example in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. Moreover, in a letter to his French translator Édouard Rod (14 July



1899), Verga declares that he had never been interested in criticism, and that he never followed the precepts of any literary school. He believed more in the writer's artistic method, and he tried to put himself 'in his characters' shoes', to see things through their eyes and to express them in their own words (Cattaneo 1963: 293-294). Verga, according to Cattaneo (1963: 171), was never a great theoretician on *Verismo*: his new ideas were more the result of a controversy against himself, against a style that he himself viewed as unsatisfactory.

## 11.2 | *Malavoglia and Mastro-don Gesualdo: plots, themes, and their fictional sub-genres*

*I Malavoglia*, published in 1881 by Treves, depicts the life and the vicissitudes of the Toscano family, nicknamed the 'Malavoglias', who live in the village of Aci Trezza, near Catania, where the economy is based on agriculture and fishing, in post-unified Italy. At the beginning of the novel the Malavoglia family is introduced: Padron (Master) 'Ntoni, his son Bastianazzo and his wife Maruzza, their children 'Ntoni, Luca, Mena, Lia and Alessi. After Bastianazzo's death at sea, the Malavoglias fail to repay the usurer Zio (Uncle) Crocifisso who had sold them some damaged lupines which were lost in the *Provvidenza*'s shipwreck. They have to leave 'their house by the medlar tree', and are afflicted by Luca's, Maruzza's and Padron 'Ntoni's deaths, by unhappy circumstances, and by 'Ntoni's and Lia's aspirations of a better life outside Aci Trezza. The family endures in Mena, and in Alessi and Nunziata's marriage and in their successful

recovery of their family house through their small horticultural and farming business.

The structure of the novel can be defined as that of a mosaic, in which the various parts and chapters are interrelated and connected with one another by means of anticipations, cross-references and allusions.<sup>3</sup> The opening of the novel has also the ‘tone’ of a fairy-tale, like that of some short-stories of *Vita dei campi*:<sup>4</sup> “Un tempo i *Malavoglia* erano stati numerosi come i sassi della strada vecchia di Trezza” (*M*, Chapter I, 7).<sup>5</sup> The novel offers two fundamental innovations for the Italian fiction of the time: its ‘circularity’, and the assignment of the narrative voice not to the traditional nineteenth-century omniscient narrator, but to a narrator who belongs to the social environment represented in the novel, and who does not coincide with any of the characters. Moreover, the multiplicity of the narrative voices – the narrator’s and especially the characters’ – provide that ‘choral dimension’ that characterises this novel, as many critics have rightly pointed out.<sup>6</sup>

As regards the themes of the novel, firstly, it could be argued that some elements of *I Malavoglia* were anticipated in the short story “Fantasticheria”, included in the collection *Vita dei campi*. The tale consists in an imaginary dialogue between Verga and the noblewoman Paolina Greppi Lester after their short visit to Aci Trezza. In this short story Verga’s narrator anticipates some of the characters that will become the Malavoglias in the later novel, and reflects on *l’ideale dell’ostrica*, which symbolises the protagonists’ attachment to their life and native place. In the novel, this attachment is exemplified in some of the

Malavoglias' tenacious attitude towards life, to which is opposed the failure of those family members who, attracted by vain illusions, leave their native environment in search of a better life.

Moreover, the central topic of *I Malavoglia* and of much of Verga's literary production that followed the short story "Nedda" is in fact the life and vicissitudes of humble people, in this case poor fishermen and peasants (Ciccia 1967: 18-19). They are represented by the same Malavoglias and their few friends, who Verga opposes to the more prosperous inhabitants of the village, who are scheming and manipulative, and who also play a fundamental role in the protagonists' misfortunes and in the plot of the novel.

Another theme that is often mentioned by Verga's critics is the unremitting rage of a cruel fate against the Malavoglias. Bárberi Squarotti (1991: 88) identifies this superior entity in an inexorable Nature, which can also be compared to the inimical Nature represented in Hardy's works. Destiny, in fact, intervenes in Bastianazzo's and Luca's deaths, and some level of negative influence, or fate, can also be witnessed in the Malavoglias' various unsuccessful attempts at improving their economic condition. Moreover, the Malavoglias' misfortunes are certainly also related to the intrigues of various members of the local community, including Zio Crocifisso, Piedipapera and Don Silvestro, as Romano (1983: 51-52) and Luperini (1968: 85-88) argue. In this sense, the 'inexorability' of Nature is combined to, if not fused with, the cruelty and the indifference of Society.

As regards the belonging of *I Malavoglia* to any fictional sub-genre, unfortunately very few critics seem to have discussed this issue. This is also the

case with *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. In fact, the former is generally considered as a *romanzo verista*, “a realist novel”. Torraca sees *I Malavoglia* as a “powerful and wide social study”, which would favour more knowledge of the conditions of Sicily (Cattaneo 1963: 196). Moreover, because of Verga’s anthropological engagement, and because of the socio-economic issues that affect the small archaic and rural community of Aci Trezza, Romano (1983: 66) defines this work as a “sociological novel”. As we have seen in the first introductory chapter of this thesis, and as my analysis will confirm in the following ones, the life of humble or lower-class people is actually not only the subject of the sociological novel, but very often also that of regional fiction, not to mention realist fiction. Moreover, the importance of family ties and of the fidelity towards the native place versus the longing for better economic and social conditions outside the native community appears to be another key feature also of regional fiction. This characterises ’Ntoni and many other individuals in this novel, and leads to the theme of the crisis of the family and of traditional professions and lifestyles, which are certainly other fundamental aspects of the book. Therefore, at this stage it could be argued that, as regards the themes of the novel, *I Malavoglia* can be considered as a sociological, realist *and* regional novel.

*Mastro-don Gesualdo* was partially published in instalments in *La Nuova Antologia* in 1888 (Cattaneo 1963: 255), and later, in a completely revised edition, by Treves in 1889. Verga’s corrections proved successful: for example, Cattaneo (1963: 256) argues that Gesualdo’s character reaches “a tragic greatness”, and



Bianca is a much improved and completely new character. Moreover, while *I Malavoglia* is characterised by a tight rhythm, *Mastro-don Gesualdo* displays a succession of great distinct scenes, and can be seen, according to Cattaneo (1963: 257), as “the ripened fruit” of *Novelle Rusticane*. Despite these improvements in the book version, this novel enjoyed a limited success, but also some good reviews.

*Mastro-don Gesualdo* tells the story of Gesualdo Motta, an enriched builder who, during the Italian *Risorgimento*, by means of his marriage to Bianca Trao, enters the decaying aristocratic world of Vizzini. He is ostracised by it and by the majority of the inhabitants of the town and by his own relatives, and eventually dies alone and disillusioned in Palermo, at his illegitimate daughter’s house, after having forced her to marry an aristocrat instead of the cousin she loved. An active, important role in the plot is also played by the aristocratic and bourgeois members of the community, especially for their constant selfish striving for personal profit and for Gesualdo’s downfall throughout the main events represented in the book.

A central theme of the novel is that of *la roba*, that is, the importance of property, the desire for possession and for acquiring as much as possible (Viti 1974: 176), a theme which is related to the one in *I Malavoglia* of improving the *status quo* and one’s economic and social condition. With *la roba* is also associated the necessity of marrying someone from the same social class or who is rich, as in Bianca’s and Isabella’s cases, and as is also the case with the young baron Rubiera.

This novel highlights the difference and rivalry among classes, and especially the gradual disintegration of the Sicilian aristocracy, which, in order to survive, is forced to ally itself – but under false pretences – with the lower classes that gave rise to the revolutionary movements in 1820 and 1848 and which are portrayed in the novel.

Another important topic of the novel, which will be analysed later in this chapter, is the disintegration of the family, whose first signs were to be found in *I Malavoglia*, and which became complete in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*.

As regards fictional sub-genres, once again few critics have discussed the issue in relation to *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. Petronio defines and discusses the book as a biographical novel, which focuses on specific moments of Gesualdo's life (1962: 271-273).<sup>7</sup> The protagonist's existence is however strongly influenced by the events occurred in his native Sicilian town and community, which are also realistically portrayed. It is for this reason that, in my opinion, it can be considered not only as Gesualdo's biography, but also as a realistic regional novel. Petronio does not consider it as a historical novel, as others do. In fact, it does not deal with the problem of the native land, nor is it a 'passionate' type of writing.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the novel does not present a detailed representation of the local historical situation – for example of the Sicilian struggle on the land issue, and its reorganisation after the passage from the feudal to the private property system in 1812. Nor does it display the patriotic enthusiasm – in this case the Sicilian vindication of its independence from Naples and from the Bourbons' dynasty – that should characterise any realistic historical fiction based on Sicily at that time.



### *11.3 The historical and social background of the two novels*

As regards the historical, political and economic background of *I Malavoglia*, it extends over from December 1863 until approximately 1878. The novel contains only a few historical references: the Battle of Lissa (1866) in Chapter IX, in which Luca dies; the cholera epidemic of 1867 in Chapter XI; the revolution against the duty on pitch in Chapter VII; and the representation of the smuggling phenomenon (especially in the second half of the novel). The community represented in *I Malavoglia* is socially differentiated, as Romano (1983: 69) points out. It is made up of wealthy owners, artisans and clerks, and daily workers. Although the main protagonists of the novel – the Malavoglias – make their living through fishing, it is important to note that the wealthier members of the community of Aci Trezza, for example Padron Cipolla, often have an income from their land properties and from fishing; in fact, they often own a fishing boat and hire daily workers. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, at the end of the novel, even the remaining members of the Malavoglias give up fishing and base their subsistence on some horticultural production. Fishing, in the novel, appears to be influenced by new transportation modes, the steam boats and the railway, which presumably damaged the small coastal communities and their potential profits. In fact, the communication system was very poor in Sicily at the time of the Unification. There was no railway system, the first railway line between Messina and Catania was completed only in 1867, and steam boats substituted sailing boats only after 1880 (Renda 2003: 1050 and 1044 respectively). Therefore, the comments made by Compare (Master) Cipolla and by Locca's son in Chapter II



(28-29) seem inaccurate: in September 1864, when their conversation is supposed to be taking place, the railway line between Messina and Catania (as well as in other areas) was still under construction, and steam boats had not completely replaced sailing boats.

What was the Sicilian reaction to the Italian unification? Despite its active participation in the *Risorgimento*, late nineteenth-century Sicily appeared resistant to national integration. This occurred not only because of the old-fashioned views of many local agricultural entrepreneurs and aristocrats, but more particularly because of the disappointing results of unification. The latter implied new and harder forms of taxation for the lower classes in general and peasants in particular, compulsory military service, and the drastic decrease in occupations related to the selling of the ecclesiastic properties to the Sicilian capitalistic bourgeoisie. This latter process was favoured by the Right government of *la Destra storica* (1861-1876) which could not afford the maintenance of such a wide workforce (Correnti 1999: 559-560). Later on, since the coming to power of the Left government in 1876, the industrialisation of Northern Italy became the main goal of the Italian economy, while the South was left in the hands of uninterested landowners (Romano 1983: 12). Sicily, however, enjoyed a successful increase in the agricultural production between 1860 and 1890 according to Renda (2003: 1046).

As Romano (1983: 40) argues, the very few historical references contained in the novel function only as topics of discussion or discontent for the community of Aci Trezza, or as causes of unhappiness for the Malavoglias, thus not as the chronicle or historical background of the novel. The references to them are

generic, and not fully analysed either by the narrator, or by the community members.<sup>9</sup> This seems to emphasise Verga's apparent detachment from the historical and political conditions of his native island. This novel, however, contains recurrent expressions of lack of faith in the newly-created Italian government, and even diffidence and opposition shown by the Sicilians towards the first changes brought by the Unification – such as the law on compulsory military service of which both 'Ntoni and Luca are victim, the telegraph, not to mention the recurrent criticism towards the new forms of taxation introduced by the Italian government (*M*, Chapter IV). The emphasis on these attitudes, together with the almost faithful representation of Sicily in general, shows that Verga was indeed very interested in the social and political conditions of his native island, but also that he chose not to speak *directly* about them, letting his characters and their condition do that in accordance with the practice of artistic detachment. The protagonists of this novel could thus also represent the point of view of the Sicilian low and middle class populace, and therefore convey the 'voice of this section of the region' on the contemporary political and economic events.

The historical setting of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is antecedent to the one of *I Malavoglia*, and spans from the 1820s to the 1850s. It is marked by the two references to the revolutionary insurrections of 1820 and 1848, together with the one of the cholera epidemic of 1837, which, according to Renda (2003: 917), was particularly acute in Siracusa and Catania. After the 1820s, the island experienced the rise of the agrarian bourgeoisie and its 'agreement' with the aristocracy

against the acquisition and possession of communal lands by the peasantry and the lower classes. Moreover, between 1820 and 1848, Sicily was subjected to new revolutionary ideas and movements. The first revolution of 1820 had a separatist intent, while the second one of 1848 (and 1849) had a federalist and patriotic purpose, and aimed at the unification of Sicily with the rest of Italy. In the former, after Ferdinand I proclaimed the new constitution in 1820, a number of Sicilians asked for independence from Naples and for the restoration of the 1812 constitution, while others favoured the Spanish one. In fact, according to Renda (2003: 867), the revolution in Palermo had aristocratic roots but also a strong popular participation and a constitutional intent, while those of Messina and Catania had bourgeois origins and democratic intents, also related to those of *la Carboneria*. The latter group adhered to the Neapolitan revolution and accepted the Spanish constitution. The civil war that followed<sup>10</sup> was eventually repressed by the intervention of the Austrians, who reimposed the Bourbons' dynasty in Sicily.

In Verga's novel, Part II, Chapter I not only describes the auction of the municipal lands during which Gesualdo is the protagonist against the nobles, but also includes references to the revolution in Palermo and to the acts of the *Carboneria*. Moreover, the following chapter describes the revolutionary uprising in Vizzini, whose aim is the division of the municipal lands among the poor and equality: "Ogni villano che vuole il suo pezzo di terra! pesci grossi e minutaglia, tutti insieme. Dicono che vi è pure il figlio del Re, nientemeno! Il Duca di



Calabria.” (*MdG* 148).<sup>11</sup> It also represents the *Carbonari*’s meeting in which Gesualdo participates, and the domination of the insurrection by the police.

The revolution of 1848-49 aimed at independence from Naples or at a better status within the kingdom, and at joining the Italian federation. This is related to the development of nationalist feelings by the Sicilian intellectuals, which, combined with the anti-Neapolitan and anti-Bourbons feelings, led towards the Sicilian participation in the *Risorgimento*. For the local intellectuals, Sicily should belong to the Italian state, but should also have federalist powers. Moreover, many Sicilians saw in the newly-elected Pope Pius IX the figure that could rule a federation of the Italian States according to the liberal-moderate and Neo-Guelf proposal (Renda 2003: 923). After the initial successes of the revolt and the departure of the Bourbons dynasty from the Sicilian throne, because of the impossibility of finding a new king and other contingencies, Filangieri, an exponent of the Bourbons, retook Palermo in May 1849 and thus resumed the Bourbon throne in Sicily.<sup>12</sup>

*Mastro-don Gesualdo* contains various references to the revolution of 1848-49 and on how it reached and affected Vizzini in Part IV, Chapter II. The egotistic intentions of the local aristocracy and bourgeoisie are also highlighted, as in the conversation between the canon-priest Lupi and Don Gesualdo:

“S’ha da fare la dimostrazione, capite? Gridare che vogliamo Pio Nono e la libertà anche noi... Se no ci pigliano la mano i villani. Dovete esserci anche voi. Non diamo il cattivo esempio, santo Dio!” (*MdG*, Part IV, Chapter II, 302)<sup>13</sup>

Verga also portrays ironically their participation in the uprising:



Nobili e plebei, passato il primo sbigottimento, erano diventati tutti una famiglia. Adesso i signori erano infervorati a difendere la libertà; preti e frati col crocifisso sul petto: o la coccarda di Pio Nono, e lo schioppo ad armacollo. (*MdG*, Part IV, Chapter III, 309)<sup>14</sup>

Part IV, Chapter III and to some extent Chapter IV, are also dedicated to the revolution, and focus on the desire of the population to steal Gesualdo's properties.

Thus, it could be argued that the historical events represented in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* assume a more relevant role in the plot than the ones included in *I Malavoglia*. In fact, they have a central function in Gesualdo's vicissitudes and in the relations among the inhabitants of Vizzini, who are the protagonists of the revolts and not just passive spectators and victims like the Malavoglias and the other characters in the previous novel.<sup>15</sup> It is especially the aristocrats' aim to protect their belongings by pretending to favour the causes of the lower classes that is highlighted and perhaps ridiculed in the latter novel. Verga, however, leaves out some important details of the historical events he included in the novel, such as the different typology of the 1820-1821 revolution in West and East Sicily. Other historical events which are represented in the novel include the cholera epidemic of 1837, which is described in Part III, Chapters I and II.

According to Paladini Musitelli (1989: 110), this novel portrays in its own way the most important economic, political and social events of the history of the island: the economic crisis of Southern Italy in the early nineteenth century represented by the decadence of the Traos; the disintegration of the craft and manufacturing industry shown by the downfall of Mastro Nunzio's gypsum kiln; and the failure of the anti-feudal measures approved by the Parliament in 1812,

which led to the auction of the communal lands. However, it could be argued, in my opinion, that these events are *implied*, insufficiently referred to or just seen *en passant*, and not fully represented. Moreover, no detailed background information on these specific social changes and historical events is provided in the novel. Paladini Musitelli (*ibid.*) also affirms that they show the precarious state of bourgeois development. The evolution of the middle-class, according to the same critic (1989: 107), is actually the subject of Verga's attention in this novel. This affirmation of the centrality of the evolution of the bourgeoisie in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* seems to me more valid if the term bourgeoisie were referred to the bourgeois entrepreneurial spirit shown by Gesualdo and by some of the aristocrats portrayed in the novel. It is true that this work depicts more members of the middle-class than *I Malavoglia* does, but in my opinion, and as already mentioned, the social contrast between the lower classes and the aristocracy, even if a decaying one, is still emphasised in the novel. In any case, Gesualdo's entrepreneurial spirit is not approved but condemned, and although by marrying Bianca Trao he joins the aristocratic group of Vizzini, he is not integrated with the local nobility. The title of *don* is probably employed with a derisive attitude, or felt as an 'obligation' because of his prosperity and economic successes.<sup>16</sup> Hence, it might be more appropriate to consider the social background of this novel as more varied and complex than the one of *I Malavoglia*, and characterised by stronger class conflicts, as Paladini Musitelli (1989: 108) says, but also by continually changing alliances against the protagonists, as also happens in *I Malavoglia*.

Thus, the references to the contemporary historical events, and to the social and economic circumstances that affected Sicily in the nineteenth century, contribute to the realism and regionalism of both novels.

#### *II.4 Verga and Sicily: landscape and setting*

As the previous chapter has shown, the role of the setting, often a rural or provincial area, is particularly important in regional fiction.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, according to Brinkley (1968: 157), the focus of the regional novel is on the peculiarities of the specific region portrayed, and especially on the local society and the effects of that specific environment on the characters' lives and the community in general.

Like most regional writers, Verga's relationship with his favourite fictional setting, Sicily, is a very profound one, and is related to his reappraisal of it – while he lived on the mainland – a phenomenon that, as already mentioned in the first chapter, he shared with many contemporary artists. This *reappraisal* of the native region was stronger among writers who had emigrated from it. However, as Ciccia explains (1967: 30-31), even though Verga's representation of Sicily was also influenced by his nostalgic feelings towards his native island,<sup>18</sup> something also confirmed by Petronio (1990: 119-122), he had nevertheless written about it even when he was living there. In fact, Sicily has always been a dominant 'force' throughout Verga's career: it is present in Verga's first sentimental and bohemian productions, either as part of the setting, or as the origin of some of the protagonists, in particular in *Una peccatrice*, *Storia di una capinera* and *Tigre*

*reale*. In *Eva*, the male protagonist, Enrico Lanti, also comes from Sicily. The representation of Sicily becomes even more relevant in *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, and also in *Vita dei campi*, *Novelle rusticane*, and partially in *Vagabondaggio* (1887). The influence of the native place – either as the specific locality, or the surrounding area, or region – is central among the literary production of regional writers. In most cases, in fact, regional novels are written by authors who willingly chose to describe and analyse *their region*, and its historical backgrounds, possibly for nostalgic feelings, or for political and social purposes.

As his letters – especially those addressed to Capuana – illustrate, Verga carried out meticulous ethnographic and folkloristic researches with the help of Giuseppe Pitrè's and Santo Rapisarda's texts; he was also determined to spend some time in Sicily in order to give 'local colour' to his Sicilian works, especially *I Malavoglia*.<sup>19</sup> However, as Luperini (1968: 79, note 9) and Ciccia (1967: 33-34) confirm, Verga did not go to Aci Trezza, but chose to represent the village with the detachment of the artist, who, in his opinion, would be able to provide a more professional, impersonal and successful representation if he were based in the more dynamic world of Milan.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, as Cirese (1976: 8-10) highlights, even if Verga had gone to Aci Trezza, he would have done so after completing his novel, "*a lavoro finito però*", to add local colour to his work, thus providing an accurate reconstruction of the reality he wished to represent interpreted by his authorial distance. The author's almost complete absence from *I Malavoglia*

confirms Verga's intended adherence to the canons of the veristic movement, and an important evolution in his narrative technique.

Verga's relationship with the setting of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is once again a very close one. In fact, he was very familiar with it, because his family was native to the area, and as mentioned above, spent some time in the countryside surrounding Vizzini during the cholera epidemic. Moreover, as referred to by Greco Lanza and also by Luperini, Verga stayed in Vizzini during the final stages of the novel's revision, where his work was deeply transformed and improved from the serial edition to the final book version,<sup>21</sup> thus perhaps suggesting the benefits of his stay. Luperini also points out that for *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, Verga carried out a scrupulous research more in harmony with the realistic and naturalistic approach to the literary topics of the time.<sup>22</sup> This approach is possibly related to the different historical period represented in the later novel, that is, a time almost completely antecedent to the author's life, and even in the case of the revolutionary riots of 1848, difficult for him to remember. Its effects are the already-mentioned more 'active' representation of the historical events in the latter novel, and a sarcastic but realistic portrayal of the decaying Sicilian aristocracy.

*I Malavoglia* is mainly set in Aci Trezza, a fishermen's and peasants' village in the east coast of Sicily, near Catania. Another minor setting is the village of Aci Castello, from where 'Ntoni leaves to go to the military service.



The city of Catania occasionally becomes part of the setting when the Malavoglias go there to consult a lawyer, or to have news about Luca after the Battle of Lissa, and for 'Ntoni's trial. Other localities mentioned in the novel include Naples, Lissa, Trieste, and Alessandria d'Egitto.

The contrast between the archaic, but established and well-known local world and the innovations of the newly-unified Italy of the time are expressed, in *I Malavoglia*, in the conflict between the country and the city, a constant theme in regional fiction, which has been closely analysed by Raymond Williams (1975) and, as we will see in chapter IV, was interestingly developed by Thomas Hardy. In *I Malavoglia*, in fact, as Romano (1983: 33) states, the city of Catania represents for the Malavoglias the centre of misfortune and catastrophe, as when Lia escapes there to become a prostitute, and Padron 'Ntoni dies there. Naples (where 'Ntoni spends some time during his military service), Trieste (near where Luca dies), and Alessandria d'Egitto, (the place where Nunziata's father has gone), are idealised by 'Ntoni as the places where a man can find his fortune and become rich. Thus, the local community, the 'nearby, everyday world' is opposed to 'the far-off, the distant world', which attracts the youngsters 'Ntoni and Lia, but brings only unhappiness. The local inbred misery is contrasted with the glamorous life of the outside world. See, for example, 'Ntoni's dreams of an easier life outside Aci Trezza expressed in the following passage: "Dopo che avevano buttato le reti [...] si metteva le mani sotto le ascelle, a guardare lontano, dove finiva il mare, e c'erano quelle grosse città dove non si faceva altro che spassarsi e non far nulla" (*M*, Chapter XI, 175),<sup>23</sup> and compare them with Mena's opposite

views: “Il peggio, disse infine Mena, è spatriare dal proprio paese, dove fino i sassi vi conoscono, e dev’essere una cosa da rompere il cuore lasciarseli dietro per la strada. ‘Beato quell’uccello, che fa il nido al suo paesello’” (*M*, Chapter XI, 172).<sup>24</sup> As is widely known, Verga himself wanted to highlight the contrast between the country, represented by Aci Trezza, and the city, as he explains in a famous letter to Capuana of 14 March 1879.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the contrast between the country and the city in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is represented through the eyes of the protagonist, who particularly suffers in his departure from his native Vizzini after his son-in-law has come to accompany him to Palermo:

Appena don Gesualdo fu in istato di poter viaggiare, lo misero in lettiga e partirono per la città. Era una giornata piovosa. Le case note, dei visi di conoscenti che si voltavano appena, sfilavano attraverso gli sportelli della lettiga [...]. E si buttò all’indietro, col cuore gonfio di tutte quelle cose che si lasciava dietro le spalle, la viottola fangosa per cui era passato tante volte, il campanile perduto nella nebbia, i fichi d’India rigati dalla pioggia che sfilavano di qua e di là della lettiga. (*MdG*, Part IV, Chapter IV, 338)<sup>26</sup>

Gesualdo’s farewell to Vizzini reminds the reader of Padron ’Ntoni’ last journey to the poorhouse:

Così padron ’Ntoni se ne andò all’ospedale sul carro di Alfio Mosca [...], ma il povero malato, sebbene non dicesse nulla, andava guardando dappertutto [...]. Sulla strada del Nero, nel passare davanti alla casa del nespolo, e nell’attraversare la piazza, padron ’Ntoni continuava a guardare di qua e di là per stamparsi in mente ogni cosa. (*M*, Chapter XV, 260-261)<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, when Gesualdo arrives in Palermo, ‘a new world’ is opened to him (*MdG*, Part IV, Chapter V, 339, translation 432). He very soon realises the level of waste that characterises the life of noble people, and starts missing his native village:

Allora gli si gonfiava il cuore al vedere i passeri che schiamazzavano su quelle tegole, il sole che moriva sul cornicione senza scendere mai giù sino alle finestre. Pensava alle strade polverose, ai bei campi dorati e verdi, al cinguettio lungo le siepi, alle belle mattinate che facevano fumare i solchi!... Oramai!... Oramai!... (*MdG*, Part IV, Chapter V, 343)<sup>28</sup>

Once Gesualdo realises that he is going to die, he wants to go back to Vizzini: “Rimandatemi a casa mia. Voglio chiuder gli occhi dove son nato!” (*MdG*, Part IV, Chapter V, 346),<sup>29</sup> but his wishes are not respected by Isabella and her husband. His nostalgia for the native place, which often characterises regional fiction, can also be compared to the one experienced by Clym Yeobright in Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, which will lead to disastrous consequences for the protagonist.

The narrative space of *I Malavoglia* is strictly related to the way the characters perceive it, and as Pirodda (1976: 87) argues, the landscape descriptions contribute to the distinguishing qualities of the characters.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the house by the medlar tree, the sea, the village square, the *sciara* (the lava field), the beach and the Rotolo rocks, Santuzza’s inn and so on all symbolise the certainty of the local world. Luperini, on the contrary, claims that the description of the local landscapes is not frequent, and appears to be influenced by the decline of romanticism in its constituting elements of the sky, the stars, the sea, and the *faraglioni*.<sup>31</sup> Whenever it is described, or better, ‘narrated’ (Romano 1983: 57), the landscape functions as the representation of human feelings and emotions. This happens, for example, at the end of the second chapter:

Le stelle ammiccavano più forte, quasi s’accendessero, e i *Tre Re* scintillavano sui *faraglioni* colle braccia in croce, come Sant’Andrea. Il mare

udiva il rumore di qualche carro che passava nel buio, sobbalzando sui sassi, e andava pel mondo il quale è tanto grande che se uno potesse camminare e camminare sempre, giorno e notte, non arriverebbe mai, e c'era pure della gente che andava pel mondo a quell'ora, e non sapeva nulla di compar Alfio, né della *Provvidenza* che era in mare, né della festa dei Morti; - così pensava Mena sul ballatoio aspettando il nonno. (*M*, Chapter II, 31-32)<sup>32</sup>

The landscape – topographically identified by the *fariglioni* rocks – and the personification and anthropomorphism of the sea, which is in itself an example of pathetic fallacy, are actually seen through Mena's eyes, and highlight the loneliness of all human beings.<sup>33</sup> Probably, this passage confirms Luperini's view on the representation of the local landscapes mentioned above. However, in contrast with his opinion, the community of Aci Trezza, the village, and its inhabitants' activities are also included in the realistic representation of the landscape to become part of it, as in the following example:

Per tutto il paese non si vedeva altro che della gente colle reti in collo, e donne sedute sulla soglia a pestare i mattoni; e davanti a ogni porta c'era una fila di barilotti, che un cristiano si ricreava il naso a passare per la strada, e un miglio prima di arrivare in paese si sentiva che San Francesco ci aveva mandata la provvidenza; non si parlava d'altro che di sardelle e di salamoia, perfino nella spezieria dove aggiustavano il mondo a modo loro. (*M*, Chapter X, 165)<sup>34</sup>

The role of the sea is also fundamental, because it provides work and money for the fishermen and the owners of the fishing-boats, and consequently for the whole community, but it can also bring death, as in the case of the Malavoglias. The landscape is always desolated and characterised by bad weather when a tragedy occurs, as in the two storms or when 'Ntoni stabs Don Michele and is arrested (*M*, Chapter XIV, 230, translation 219), or in the final famous images of the novel, when 'Ntoni has just left the Malavoglia's house for good (*M*, Chapter XV, 271-272, translation 257-258). The solitude and desolation of the village and



of 'Ntoni, and again, the 'animation' of the houses at dawn and of the sea are certainly the key elements of this passage.

Most of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is set in Vizzini, a town near Caltagirone, in the province of Catania, where the local economy is chiefly based on agriculture. Instead, the last part of the novel is set in Palermo, at the Leyra's residence.

Luperini (1968: 195) describes the nature represented in *I Malavoglia* as mythic, while that of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is realistic and aimed at emphasising the protagonist's solitude. Greco Lanza points out that the representation of the setting or of the landscapes in the novel is provided 'through the eyes' of the protagonist.<sup>35</sup> This, as previously shown, is also a chief element of *I Malavoglia*. Raya (1950: 296) also claims that the local colour in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is achieved by means of the images of the village and the descriptions filtered by the characters' psychology. This can be seen for example in Part I, Chapter III, when Bianca's perception of the landscape after her conversation with Nini Rubiera is particularly significant (*MdG* 50-51, translation 61-62). The *struggimento*, the anguish felt by Bianca is transposed into the landscape, and the solitary star symbolises Bianca herself and the many tears that she has shed because of her unhappy love for Nini. The entire landscape seems 'to share' her agony; the external noises and events are marginal and function as a refuge for the unbearable suffering of the two protagonists; silence is particularly poignant, highlighting the final impossibility for the couple to have a future together.



Other fundamental regional landscape images are to be found in the following chapter (Chapter IV), which illustrates Mastro-don Gesualdo's hard working day in his various land properties. For example, on his way to Camemi, the landscape is particularly arid, infernal and apocalyptic, according to Luperini (1989: 70), and it is once again perceived through Gesualdo's mind, feelings and sensations:

Brontolava ancora allontanandosi all'ambio della mula sotto il sole cocente: un sole che spaccava le pietre adesso, e faceva scoppiettare le stoppie quasi s'accendessero. Nel burrone, fra i due monti, sembrava di entrare in una fornace; e il paese in cima al colle, arrampicato sui precipizi, disseminato fra rupi enormi, minato da caverne che lo lasciavano come sospeso in aria, nerastro, rugginoso, sembrava abbandonato, senza un'ombra, con tutte le finestre spalancate nell'afa, simili a tanti buchi neri, le croci dei campanili vacillanti nel cielo caliginoso. La stessa mula anelava, tutta sudata, nel salire la via erta. (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter IV, 60-61)<sup>36</sup>

However, it is the description of the *Canziria* that shows Gesualdo's possessions and one of the few moments of relaxation and happiness for this industrious man:

Egli uscì fuori a prendere il fresco. Si mise a sedere su di un covone, accanto all'uscio, colle spalle al muro, le mani penzoloni fra le gambe. La luna doveva essere già alta, dietro il monte, verso Francofonte. Tutta la pianura di Passanitello, allo sbocco della valle, era illuminata da un chiarore d'alba. A poco a poco, al dilagar di quel chiarore, anche nella costa cominciarono a spuntare i covoni raccolti in mucchi, come tanti sassi posti in fila. Degli altri punti neri si muovevano per la china, e a secondo del vento giungeva il suono grave e lontano dei campanacci che portavano il bestiame grosso, mentre scendeva passo passo verso il torrente [...]. Nell'aia la bica alta e ancora scura sembrava coronata d'argento, e nell'ombra si accennavano confusamente altri covoni in mucchi; ruminava altro bestiame; un'altra striscia d'argento lunga si posava in cima al tetto del magazzino, che diventava immenso nel buio. (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter IV, 69)<sup>37</sup>

For the first time, we see a relaxed Gesualdo, who not only has the time to rest, but can also admire his prosperous possessions at the dawn of a new working day. The representation of the local landscape actually focuses on the protagonist's properties. Once again, the landscape is seen through the eyes of the character,

and it is in harmony with his feelings, an element that can also be found in Hardy's and Lawrence's representation of scenery and landscapes. This also occurs in the representation of Mangalavite, where Gesualdo and his family find refuge during the cholera, and which is described in this case by the narrator from Isabella's perspective (*MdG*, Part III, Chapter II, 232, translation 293). Unlike her father, (*MdG*, Part III, Chapter II, 233, translation 294), Isabella is not fit for this rural environment and does not integrate into it. Her infatuation for Corrado La Gurna is a form of escape from the isolation and solitude felt by the young woman in this environment.

In the same novel, great relevance is also given to the description of the main characters' houses, and to the role played by them in the representation of the events and on the characters' social status. Among them, the Trao and the Sganci palaces, the Motta house and later Don Gesualdo's palace and his country houses and farms, all share an important role in the novel.<sup>38</sup> This is related to the central function of property in this novel, and possibly to the theme of *la casa negata*, "the denied home", which is related, according to Pirodda (1989b: 142-143), also to that of *la famiglia negata*, "the denied family". Gesualdo, in fact, as we shall see later on in this chapter, is not only denied happiness within his family, but also within his houses: he is a stranger at the Sgancis' during the patron saint's celebrations, at his family home and even at Mangalavite, where he enjoys his properties but is alienated from his wife and daughter, not to mention at the Leyras' residence in Palermo, where he dies. This theme, as Pirodda only briefly points out, was also a central one in *Malavoglia*, and can therefore be seen

as a link between the two novels. In *I Malavoglia*, however, it is also the initial cohesion of the family that gives more strength to the ‘house by the medlar tree’, which continues in the rented butcher’s house, and partially survives in the ‘reshaped’ family nucleus of Alessi, Nunziata, their children and Mena.

According to Luperini (1968: 147), landscape representations in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* are less frequent in comparison with that of *I Malavoglia*, and the technique employed is more realistic. The descriptions mainly focus on the representation of Gesualdo’s land properties, and their tone is somehow tragic and dramatic, especially in the two mentioned landscapes that Gesualdo passes by on his way to the *Canziria* (the arid ravines and gorges).<sup>39</sup> Ragonese (1977: 105-109), on the other hand, claims that the landscapes of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* vary from a decisive, essential and severe representation of Mangalavite or the Petrajo region to a more fluent and detailed one of Canziria and Alia. Although it is true that the landscapes in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* are less lyrical, in my opinion most of them also contain some poetic, romantic, and possibly pastoral elements, for example the ones of Canziria and Mangalavite.

Finally, related to the setting of the novels is the ‘theme of the journey away from the native place’, which affects not only Bastianazzo, Luca, Lia, and Padron ’Ntoni, but especially ’Ntoni and Alfio in *I Malavoglia*, while in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* it is the same protagonist, Gesualdo, who undergoes it in the last stages of his disease, and also his daughter Isabella, who moves from Vizzini to Palermo

twice in the course of her life. Most members of the local community share their fear of what lies outside Aci Trezza; in fact, the journey and the departure from the native village usually brings only unhappiness, death and sorrow. An exception is given in Compare Cipolla's father, who made his fortune away from native Sicily, but never returned to Aci Trezza. The journey is associated with a definitive separation, and makes the return to a world that has greatly changed even more difficult and disheartening, as Pirodda (1976: 108-110) also states. This is exemplified in Alfio's words: "Quando uno lascia il suo paese è meglio che non ci torni più, perché ogni cosa muta faccia mentre egli è lontano, e anche le faccie con cui lo guardano son mutate, e sembra che sia diventato straniero anche lui" (*M*, Chapter XV, 252).<sup>40</sup> This theme is also common to Deledda and Hardy: in *Elias Portolu*, Elias himself initially struggles to settle down again in Nuoro after his return from prison. In *The Return of the Native*, Clym Yeobright experiences work and life outside his native area when he goes to Paris, but his working projects in Egdon Heath miserably fail in the end. Moreover, Lawrence's Cyril and Lettie Beardsall in *The White Peacock*, and the Morel brothers in *Sons and Lovers*, who move to cities and even to the metropolis of London, also suffer some level of *déracinement* from their native place. These movements and migrations often make the characters of regional fiction lose their comfortable, peaceful relationship with their native locale and environment when they eventually return there, or force them to face divisive emotions of attachment to their loved ones, and distance from their working and social prospects.



### II.5 The customs of Sicily

The realistic and faithful representation of *sicilianità* “Sicilianness” in Verga’s works is also emphasised by the occurrence of folkloristic and traditional elements typical of the region. As Ciccia says, *I Malavoglia* is the work in which Verga better shows his knowledge of Sicilian customs and traditions.<sup>41</sup> Except in the case of Mena and Brasi’s engagement party, and the related custom of the *spadina d’argento*, “a little silver hair slide”,<sup>42</sup> which according to Ciccia, is actually put on and not removed on the wedding day,<sup>43</sup> and is usually a present given by the fiancé, Verga’s representation of Sicilian customs is accurate and detailed. For example, the custom of the *comari di basilico*, a form of *comparatico*, which is achieved by means of the donation of a vase of basil to the person with whom one wants to create a special tie, as Ciccia (1967: 88) quoting Russo explains,<sup>44</sup> is perfectly represented in this novel (*M*, Chapter IX, 114, translation 111).

Sicilian customs are also described in the case of the visit of condolence, the *cunsolu*, after Bastianazzo’s death; guests are supposed to bring something, especially food, and should avoid talking or limit the conversation to the praise of the dead (*M*, Chapter IV, 42, translation 40).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the Sicilian Christmas traditions are also highlighted in the novel, with the images of saints decorated with green boughs and oranges, the shrines adorned by lights, and the bagpiper playing every evening (*M*, Chapter VI, 69, and 70-71, translation 66-67 and 68). The feast of the Ascension also has some characteristic customs in Sicily, which partly appear in *I Malavoglia* (Chapter IX, 114, translation 111 and 112).<sup>46</sup> These examples highlight Verga’s efforts to provide as far as possible a faithful and



accurate representation of the local community and of its autochthonous customs and traditions regarding engagements, relationships and condolences, which helps convey and maintain the realistic and regionalist connotations of this novel.

Verga's characters are also superstitious and believe in magic, like Deledda's and Hardy's, and in some types of popular medicine and remedies. In *I Malavoglia*, many characters appear to be religious and devoted to the Virgin Mary and the saints. Many of them wear the blessed dress of the Virgin (*l'abitino benedetto della Madonna*), which consists of two small pieces of fabric tied together with two strings, so that the wearers can put their head inside and have one piece on their breast and the other one on their back (Ciccia 1967: 107). Padron 'Ntoni also has 'Ntoni's shirt exorcised when the young man starts behaving strangely.

Popular remedies are also mentioned in both novels and include rosemary and mallow leaves against cholera, the "*l'aceto dei sette ladri*", "*the Vinegar of the Seven Thieves*" required for Padron 'Ntoni and also for Don Diego in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*.<sup>47</sup> Other medicaments presented in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* are: "*l'erba di Lazzaro risuscitato*" (Part II, Chapter III, 173) "*the herb of Lazarus Risen*" (translation 217), and "*lo sciroppo di marziale, delle teste di chiodo in una bottiglia d'acqua*" (Part III, Chapter II, 238), "*Mars syrup, and nail-heads in a bottle of water*" (translation 300) for Isabella.

*Mastro-don Gesualdo* also provides some examples of religious celebrations and local superstitions and beliefs, although their number is inferior to that of *I Malavoglia*.<sup>48</sup> As regards superstitions, this is possibly related to the fact that the predominant social class represented in the novel is the more educated aristocracy. The main religious representation is the patron saint procession described in Part I, Chapter III, when most of Vizzini aristocracy has been invited to the Sgancis to watch it. The patron saint of Vizzini is San Gregorio Magno, Saint Gregory the Great, and the celebrations occur on 12 June. The representation is intermingled with the guests' gossip and secret plans, thus highlighting their scant attention to the religious event. Verga, unlike Deledda and Hardy, in fact, limits his descriptions to the essential moments of the festivity, and does not provide any cultural or historical background information to the event. This appears to be in harmony with Verga's declared avoidance of any type of direct narratorial comments or clarifications. Moreover, it could be argued that Verga saw festivities as a pretext to gather together most of the protagonists of the novel, and to observe their machinations. In fact, in the case of the patron saint celebrations, they are limited to the fireworks, which presumably announce the beginning of the procession (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter III, 231-232 and 237, translation 40 and 51), and to the climax of the celebration, with the saint's statue appearing in the street:

Viva il santo Patrono! Viva san Gregorio Magno! – Nella folla, laggiù in piazza, il canonico Lupi, il quale urlava come un ossesso, in mezzo ai contadini, e gesticolava verso i balconi del palazzo Sganci, col viso in su, chiamando ad alta voce i conoscenti. (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter III, 43)<sup>49</sup>

As in the festivities represented in Deledda's novels, in which love relationships begin or are favoured, it is during this religious festival that the plot of arranging Gesualdo and Bianca's marriage is put forward.

Some superstitions are also mentioned in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. In Part I, Chapter IV, references to the 'evil eye' are to be found in the dialogue between Gesualdo and the keeper of the Canziria property (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter IV, 67, translation 82). Similarly, Baroness Rubiera believes that the actress Aglae has put a spell on her son. Other superstitions are the gesture of *fare le corna*, "touch wood", and it is also considered bad luck to tie a mule to the house of a dying man.<sup>50</sup> With the exception of Baroness Rubiera, only the less educated characters share these beliefs.

Forms of religious faith include the employment of pictures of saints for the protection of people, their belongings and activities, as occurs in the collapse of the bridge in Part I, Chapter V, and especially when Don Diego falls ill and his brother buys the picture of St. Joseph to help him to recover (*MdG*, Part II, Chapter III, 165, translation 208). The devotion to the saints is particularly strong in Sicily: as Pitre (1978a: 21) explains, it is a substitute for the love of God, and is applied in the most various circumstances, as exemplified in the previous passage and in the one where the relic of the Madonna is employed to favour Bianca's recovery (*MdG*, Part IV, Chapter II, 305, translation 386-387). The protection of saints is also required for Gesualdo (*MdG*, Part IV, Chapter IV, 336, translation 428). The latter also recurs to the Madonna in order to make Isabella forget Corrado (*MdG*, Part III, Chapter IV, 264, translation 334-335). All these episodes

demonstrate the mixture of religion and superstitious beliefs that characterises the inhabitants of Vizzini.

Finally, in his representation of Sicilian customs, which certainly contribute to the regionalism of this novel, Verga also describes some aspects of the Sicilian wedding traditions in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. In fact, the newly-married couple of Gesualdo and Bianca find, according to the local customs, at their return home, the stairs covered by orange leaves, as a good wish for their marriage (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter VII, 109, translation 136). The sprinkling of orange leaves is a Sicilian tradition also reported by Pitrè (1978b: 75).

## II.6 Characters

As regards characters, in *I Malavoglia* Verga does not usually provide an accurate physical or psychological portrait of them, but makes them act more like a chorus, a community, while maintaining their individuality at the same time. Interestingly, Verga chooses to employ nicknames for his characters, in harmony with the Sicilian tradition of *l'ingiuria*, to describe them.<sup>51</sup> Sometimes, these nicknames are 'antiphrastic', that is, they highlight the opposite of the physical or moral qualities shown by the characters: for example, *la Longa* is actually a small woman; the *Malavoglias* are not 'ill willed' or 'indolent', but good, honest sea people. The society of Aci Trezza, which unlike some critics have said, is not completely isolated and closed within itself, but on the contrary undergoes the influence of the external political and socio-economic phenomena of the time



(Pirodda 1976: 113),<sup>52</sup> is also socially differentiated, as mentioned earlier in this chapter (II.4).

The relations among the various characters of the novel are characterised by the contrast in the values they represent and want to protect.<sup>53</sup> At a first level, there are three conflicts within the Malavoglia family:<sup>54</sup> the first between Padron 'Ntoni and his grandson 'Ntoni, the second between 'Ntoni and his brother Alessi and the third between Lia and her sister Mena. All of them are characterised by an antagonism between the preservation and protection of traditional values like the familial institution, self-sacrifice, honesty and hard work, and the search for more modern lifestyles and better economic conditions. This conflict between old and new values can also be associated with the one between the local, circumscribed life of Aci Trezza, and the world outside the small village, the city (Catania), mainland Italy (Naples) or even foreign places (Alessandria d'Egitto).

Moreover, family and offspring have a central role in Sicilian society, as is also emphasised by Pitre (1978a: 30 and 32). Thus, Verga's message in his *ideale dell'ostrica* is aimed at people like 'Ntoni and Lia, who break away from their family and environment only to be 'swallowed' by the cruel world; instead, they should learn to accept their social condition and do their best in those circumstances for the welfare of their family. Moreover, as Luperini argues, the conflict between the paternal figure of Padron 'Ntoni and his grandson symbolises 'Ntoni's exclusion from the community and especially from his family, as also occurs to the eponymous protagonists of *Rosso Malpelo* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* (Luperini 1974: 76-77).



*I Malavoglia* has often been described as a novel in which family values are protected and enhanced.<sup>55</sup> However, the conflicts that distinguish their family unit highlight the contemporary crisis of family values and needs, which are contrasted with the individual needs, a theme that is also analysed in Deledda, Hardy and Lawrence. Moreover, the contrast between the Malavoglias plus their few friends (Alfio, Nunziata and Anna) as the tenacious representatives of the traditional family values, hard work and sacrifice, and the local community inclined towards more progressive individual prosperity and economic and social rise, is constant throughout the novel. It also becomes evident in the multiplicity of the points of view of the novel, which highlights the different approaches to life of the Malavoglias and of the community of Aci Trezza.

As a matter of fact, conflicts also exist among the other members of the Aci Trezza community: as Romano (1983: 83) argues, they are highlighted in the contrasts between the reactionary and pro-Bourbons priest Don Giammaria and the pro-republic and anticlerical pharmacist Don Franco, or between the passionate Don Michele and the astute calculating Don Silvestro, both interested in Barbara Zuppidda. Bárberi Squarotti (1991: 90) believes that through the characters' actions, Verga makes Aci Trezza the mirror of the Italian socio-political condition in the late nineteenth century, and in the contrast between their family and values and the whole contemporary society is exemplified the opposition between the Malavoglias and the rest of the community (Bárberi Squarotti 1991: 99). However, in my opinion, the crisis that affected family values

was possibly more widespread among the inhabitants of circumscribed, archaic and scarcely productive areas like Aci Trezza, where the desire to improve one's limited economic conditions was certainly stronger among the younger generations, who were also more inclined to leave their native place, or, in the case of Italian men, forced to do so by compulsory military service.

As regards the 'sense of belonging' of the various characters of this novel to their native region, and in particular to Aci Trezza, it can be argued that not all of them can be defined as perfectly at ease and settled in their environment. In fact, Padron 'Ntoni, Maruzza, Mena, Alessi, Nunziata, Comare Anna, Alfio and some of the members of the community are certainly 'faithful to their region' because of their attachment to their native place, their professional choices, their adaptation to what their native environment can offer, and especially their Sicilian 'spirit' and philosophy of life. 'Ntoni, Lia and perhaps Don Silvestro – the outsider who has integrated himself into Aci Trezza to alter it from within – but who is also unwelcome and not trustworthy according to comare Venera Zuppidda (*M*, Chapter XV, 264, translation 251) – on the other hand, are the least settled ones because they aspire to a new, more prosperous life outside Aci Trezza, in the mainland or even abroad ('Ntoni), or at least in a town or city (Lia).

Unlike in *I Malavoglia*, in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* Verga presents a main protagonist, Gesualdo Motta, an ingenious builder who has managed to improve his social status and whose figure appears more prominent if compared to the

other characters. The latter, however, also play an important function for the plot. Their typology is more varied than that portrayed in *I Malavoglia*, in the sense that it not only includes common people like peasants and Gesualdo's numerous employees and family, but also members of the local bourgeoisie and especially of the aristocracy, a social class that is less frequently portrayed in regional novels. In fact, characters usually belong to the low and middle classes in this type of fiction.

As both Paladini Musitelli (1989: 108) and Pirodda (1989b: 136) claim, in this novel, unlike in *I Malavoglia*, Verga does not describe just a local community, but the more organised and layered society of a small provincial town, in which the personal and class economic interests of the protagonists predominate, and I would add, do so once again over family and friendship values. In this sense, characters are often hypocritical and two-faced, as they are also in the earlier novel, and rarely show their true feelings to one another (Pirodda 1989b: 137).<sup>56</sup> Unlike *I Malavoglia*, the characters' descriptions and gestures appear more frequent and relevant, and also the 'theatricals' of the novel, which highlight the actions and the dialogues of the characters in specific episodes, is also accentuated (Pirodda 1989b: 139-141). In this respect, Pirodda discusses the grotesque aspect in characters in reference to their gesticulation and physicality. As in *I Malavoglia*, this occurs especially in the case of minor characters, while for the major ones their personality and inner life are also described (Pirodda 1989b: 149-151).<sup>57</sup> Parallelisms among characters are also present: see for example the one between Mastro-don Gesualdo and Baroness

Rubiera for their obsession with property, or between Bianca and her daughter Isabella, both seduced by their respective cousins, but who marry other men.<sup>58</sup> Other important but conflicting relationships are those between Gesualdo and his family, and between Bianca and her relatives. They highlight, once more, the central role of the familial institution in the Sicilian society, which, in some way or another, is denied to the protagonist, as previously mentioned (Pirodda 1989b: 151).

Mastro-don Gesualdo is described by D. H. Lawrence (1955: 276-277) as a Greek, because of his energy, quickness, vividness, passion for wealth, ambition, lack of scruples, “queer openness” (1955: 277), astuteness, and his lack of soul and lofty ideals.<sup>59</sup> Russo (1934: 292), instead, sees him as the most complex and poetic character created by Verga. According to the Italian critic,<sup>60</sup> he is a central, lonely figure, who feels a nostalgic tenderness for his land properties and for land in general. Both descriptions seem valid, and the complexity of this character is certainly one of the most successful features of this novel. For example, Gesualdo’s portrait, in Part I, Chapter III, at the Sganci’s house, presents a working man in his best Sunday outfit who, after his initial embarrassment at his introduction in the aristocratic world, soon regains his control when asked about his hard work and achievements. However, it is especially in the following chapter that we see Gesualdo at his best, very busy, angry and authoritative, but also occasionally funny and ironic, for example with Diodata.

In Part IV, the reader witnesses Gesualdo’s physical and economic decline, and ultimately his death. The contrast between Gesualdo’s material prosperity and

his physical decay is shown immediately before his move to Palermo, when he realises that his life is near its end, and that his properties and the world in general will survive and go on without his contribution (*MdG*, Part IV, Chapter IV, 337, translation 429-430).

As a matter of fact, the loneliness of Verga's characters – especially in death, in particular of Padron 'Ntoni and Gesualdo, and also of Mastro Nunzio and Bianca – has been highlighted and analysed by various critics.<sup>61</sup> Mastro-don Gesualdo's death can be compared to Padron 'Ntoni's one because they both die alone and unassisted by their relatives. However, as Luperini (1991: 212) points out, in *I Malavoglia*, despite Padron 'Ntoni's death, the preservation of the family values is guaranteed by Alessi, while in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* the protagonist's values are completely eliminated with his death: in fact, his daughter Isabella is unable to share them, and is lost in her own problems and unhappy life.

Moreover, Mastro-don Gesualdo, like 'Ntoni in *I Malavoglia*, does not respect *l'ideale dell'ostrica*: he is too ambitious, does not accept his social status, and is consequently punished. He does not follow his father's advice “Fa l'arte che sai!” (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter IV, 70) and “Ciascuno com'è nato.” (*MdG*, Part III, Chapter I, 227).<sup>62</sup> According to Muñiz Muñiz (1989: 120), the tragedy of Gesualdo is firstly due to his wrong, inappropriate marriage with Bianca: he is a builder who marries a decadent noble woman who is expecting a baby by somebody else. Secondly, by the unhappy life led by their (her) daughter Isabella, caused by her father's opposition to her marriage with Corrado La Gurna. In Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, the marriage between Gertrude and Walter Morel is



also an unhappy one because of the class difference between the two and the rigidity of Mrs Morel. In Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, Clym and Eustacia's marriage is also unsuccessful because of the different ideals, aspirations and opposite relation with Egdon Heath. Thus, in these novels, the failure of the family unit is also caused by the inappropriateness of the marriage component.

Because of Mastro-don Gesualdo's constant contrast with his family and community, it can be argued that his character is not fully integrated into his native society, and that at intervals he appears as an outsider: as canon Lupi tells him, "Voi siete l'estraneo... siete il nemico, che diavolo!" (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter V, 89).<sup>63</sup> Everybody else is against him, or pretends to be an ally while he/she is plotting against him and his interests, with the exception of Diodata and Mastro Nardo. Nevertheless, Gesualdo is partially at ease with his environment through his sentimental attachment to his native place, and through his economic participation in its improvement: in fact, he gives work to many people; he is generous and fair towards them. Instead, Isabella, the central figure of Part III, appears as a solitary, melancholic and stubborn young woman, who is negatively influenced by her too aristocratic and sentimental education, which makes her initially idealise her native place, her family and life in general, and also leads to her infatuation with Corrado La Gurna. Eventually, she despises Vizzini and her origins, and finds refuge in her luxurious but empty life in Palermo, thus *repudiating* her initial attachment to her native town and consequently her belonging to it for her social interests. On the other hand, Diodata, like Bianca and

Mena of *I Malavoglia*, represents the ideal of the humble but generous woman, resigned to her destiny (Raya 1950: 299), and *at peace* with her native environment. Moreover, the other characters of the novel, with the exception of Mastro Nardo, only manifest their selfishness and personal economic interests, which are not related to the welfare of the community. They are, however, integrated with it, because they constitute the majority, the *dominant force* of Vizzini. They are static characters, who are powerful and in control of the local society only on the basis of their titles and their birth, as in the case of the aristocracy, with the exception of Baroness Rubiera, who has lower-class origins. The aristocrats, for example, *pretend* to believe in equality and solidarity during the two revolutions of 1820 and 1848, but only to protect themselves and their property from the insurgents' action. Therefore, they could be considered as 'regional' characters because of their dominant role within the community, and also because they unfortunately represented a social group whose power affected the politics, economy, and society of contemporary Sicily.

Finally, it is important to remember that the Sicilian people portrayed by Verga in his more realistic works *Vita dei campi*, *I Malavoglia*, *Novelle Rusticane* (with the partial exception of *Mastro-don Gesualdo*), that is, especially peasants, fishermen, artisans and small entrepreneurs, did not belong to Verga's own social class, the high bourgeoisie. It is possibly this social distance that allowed the author to abstain from a direct emotional involvement with their tragedies, a convention of Naturalism and *Verismo*, and to let his characters directly move and involve the readers in their vicissitudes instead. In fact, it could be argued that this

social distance also favoured the maintenance of the creative and artistic distance that Verga saw as a fundamental element of his realistic fiction. The same social distance does not occur in the case of Deledda and Lawrence, who belong to the same class and social group they choose as protagonists of their works, and it does not have a crucial role in Hardy's regional production, because of the fact that the author's presence and knowledge are constantly felt in the text by means of the narratorial interventions.

### *11.7 Language*

Verga's language and style underwent several changes throughout his career, which have been discussed by numerous critics, especially as the novel *I Malavoglia* is concerned. Raya (1962: 23), for example, emphasises the *fiorentinismi*, "Florentinisms", employed in *Eva*, one of Verga's earlier works.<sup>64</sup> The same critic (1962: 20) also points out that the reminiscences of Manzoni's style that can be found in Verga's first novel *Amore e patria* also reappear in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. From *Vita dei campi* onwards, Verga tried to adapt his language and style to the social groups that were the new subject of his work – peasants, low-class and working-class people – but the results were not always appropriate. In this collection, for example, again according to Raya, Verga tries to create a language that could express the 'popular truth' of its protagonists, but which was also a literary truth. This combination of realism and literariness did not prove linguistically and stylistically successful, as for example in "Fantasticheria", and showed Verga's difficulties in renouncing the old language

(Raya 1962: 29). Ciccia (1967: 41), instead, points out that short stories such as “Nedda”, “Jeli”, and others contain rustic images together with literary ones. In fact, they include scholarly words that do not fit in the setting and style of the narration. This continues to occur also in *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo*.

Therefore, although the language of regional fiction is usually characterised by a realistic dialogue, often combined with the employment of the local dialect for representational purposes, and to mark the characters’ idiolect and speech, it could be argued that Verga’s realistic and regional novels *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* only partially confirm this. In them, a literary Italian language, containing Tuscanisms or Florentinisms is combined with the insertion of Sicilian dialectal items. In this sense, Verga’s style appears to be close to Deledda’s and Hardy’s: it includes the presence of dialectal items, but the language employed in these realistic, regional novels is Standard Italian, which is also adopted in Deledda’s novels; Hardy selected Standard English for his regional works. As we shall see in the next chapter, however, Deledda, unlike Hardy, employs paratextual features for the explanation of dialectal and culture-specific items. D. H. Lawrence, on the other hand, does not provide any explanation or translation of the dialogues written in the local English dialect, which have for example Mr Morel as protagonist in *Sons and Lovers*, or Annable and George Saxton in *The White Peacock*; both novels, however, are written in Standard English.

Examples of what Raya (1962: 41) calls *scorie letterarie*, which are reminiscences of his previous refined Tuscan style, in *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-*

*don Gesualdo* include the noun *piccina* in “Poi veniva la Longa, una piccina che badava a tessere, salare le acciughe, e far figliuoli, da buona massaia” (*M*, Chapter I, 8),<sup>65</sup> and according to Ciccia (1967: 42), *almanaccando* (*M*, Chapter IX, 113 and 135) and others.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, according to Salibra (1994: 225), many affinities characterise the language of *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* with regard to the employment or the influence of the Tuscan dialect. They can be found at lexical, phraseological and grammatical levels. However, as regards the differences, the usage of Tuscan variants is more common and preferred by Verga in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* not only at linguistic and lexical levels, but especially at the stylistic one, which is characterised by the frequency of lexemes which carry comic connotations, like *scutrettolare*, [*correva*] *balzelloni*, (*MdG*, Part III, Chapter IV, 270) “came lurching” (343), and others (Salibra 1994: 226).<sup>67</sup> In this novel, for the same critic (1994: 226-227), there is also a homology between narrated and spoken language, while at grammatical and phraseological levels this is less common. Regarding *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, Salibra speaks of “an automatic Tuscanism”, which is already present in the spoken Italian of the educated Sicilian middle-class,<sup>68</sup> and is therefore not imported by Verga but already present in his and in the middle-class language. Tuscan is therefore employed in order to provide a more appropriate and specific vocabulary, or a kind of expressiveness different from that offered by the native dialect (Salibra 1994: 229).



Some general linguistic and stylistic features of *I Malavoglia* include the frequent repetitions of adjectives and verbs, and of ellipsis and pleonasm. The repetition of a sentence in two consecutive sequences is another important characteristic of this novel. It provides the narrative continuum, and that sense of 'circularity' that identifies *I Malavoglia*, and frequently occurs at the end of a chapter and at the beginning of the next one, as for example Chapter III and Chapter IV: "Che disgrazia! dicevano sulla via. E la barca era carica! Più di quarant'onze di lupini!" (*M* 39) and "Il peggio era che i lupini li avevano presi a credenza" (*M* 40).<sup>69</sup>

As regards syntax, Verga chooses to link the various sentences by means of conjunctions, especially *e*, "and", which, according to Ciccia (1967: 46)<sup>70</sup>, helps to maintain the 'musicality' – perhaps in the sense of an accumulative rhythm – of Verga's language, as in:

Il sole c'era lì per tutti, *e* l'ombra degli ulivi per mettersi al fresco, *e* la piazza per passeggiare, *e* gli scalini della chiesa per stare a chiacchierare, *e* lo stradone per veder passare la gente *e* sentir le notizie, *e* l'osteria per mangiare *e* bere con gli amici. (*M*, Chapter XIII, 212)<sup>71</sup> (emphasis mine)

Another key feature of Verga's language is the employment of free indirect style. Its usage creates ambiguity in the discourse, because it avoids a clear distinction between what the narrator and the characters say. Moreover, Verga makes the narrating voice overcome or mix with those of each character (Romano 1983: 48-50). In fact, Luperini (1974: 47 and 99-102) for example argues that Verga regresses to the narrating voice that represents the point of view of the archaic rural society and the logic of the community of Aci Trezza, and not that of

the Malavoglia family, although it is clear that the author stands by the latter. In fact, there are several passages in which the point of view of the Malavoglias is conveyed, as well as that of each individual protagonist, and not disregarded, as Luperini's comment seems to imply. Cecchetti also sees in the characters' thoughts and words given in the narratorial stream "an embryonic form of interior monologue."<sup>72</sup>

Another recurrent characteristic of the language of *I Malavoglia* is the employment of animal similes in reference to the characters. According to Romano (1983: 63), Verga uses them in order to emphasise the lower-class language and way of thinking of the characters, and therefore to distinguish them from the bourgeois implied reader. For example, Padron 'Ntoni is described as *un gufo*, "an owl" and Don Silvestro *ride come una gallina*, "laughs like a hen".

The employment of proverbs is also very common, especially in Padron 'Ntoni's case, who uses them not only to strengthen his words and opinions, but even to express them. In fact, this character has a continuous recourse to them to express his view of life and of the world, and to highlight the importance of family, co-operation and sacrifice, as the following list provided by the 'popular narrator' demonstrates:

Padron 'Ntoni sapeva anche certi *motti* e proverbi che aveva sentito dagli *antichi*, "perché il motto degli antichi mai menti": – "Senza pilota barca non cammina" – "Per far da papa bisogna saper far da sagrestano" – oppure – "Fa il mestiere che sai, che se non arricchisci camperai" – "Contentati di quel che t'ha fatto tuo padre; se non altro non sarai un birbante" ed altre sentenze giudiziose. (*M*, Chapter I, 8)<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, Ciccia also emphasises and discusses the contrast between Padron 'Ntoni's strong belief in proverbs and his grandson 'Ntoni's disrespect for

them. 'Ntoni, in fact, is disillusioned by the unhappy events and circumstances that his family has to endure, and the encouragement that his grandfather tries to offer him with the proverbs does not achieve its purpose. Only at the end of the novel will 'Ntoni understand the value of and the truth contained in his grandfather's sayings (Ciccio 1967: 144-147). Nevertheless, for Bárberi Squarotti (1991: 94), the purpose of Padron 'Ntoni's proverbs is not achieved in the end, because the application of their archaic and outdated content fails when they face progress and a modernised society.

Ciccio (1967: 137-139) and also Cirese (1976: 6-8 and 13) highlight the fact that Verga employed not only Sicilian proverbs, but also others from different parts of Italy. Verga carried out careful research on them, translated and adapted them to the Italian language, keeping or adding a certain rhythmic assonance. Their function would therefore be the most appropriate expression of the language and thoughts of the humble, of primitives in general. Raya (1962: 35) in fact, argues that the language of *I Malavoglia* is the language of the fishermen of Acitrezza, who are representatives of the above mentioned humble.

The employment of proverbs, of recurrent nicknames and expressions also highlights the ideological fixedness of Verga's characters, as Ciccio and Cirese claim. In fact, as Ciccio explains, their primitive status is characterised by frequent pauses, and by a limited and repetitive vocabulary and set of actions: for example, the *Provvidenza* is, after the tempest, *come una scarpa vecchia*, "like an old shoe"; on four occasions, Mena and Nunziata are like protective *chiocce*, sitting hens; Don Michele is always described *colla pistola sulla pancia e i*

*calzoni dentro gli stivali* (*M*, Chapter XIV, 232), “his pistol on his belly and his pants stuffed into his boots” (221); and compare Alfio repeats the concept that if somebody leaves his native place he should never return to it. This fixedness is also linked to the characters’ simple but also old-fashioned and unchangeable way of thinking,<sup>74</sup> and certainly to their limited perspective offered by Aci Trezza’s restricted horizon. The employment of proverbs and sayings is also typical of small, isolated communities, where traditional ways of seeing life are still valued and recognised.

As regards dialect, Raya (1962: 52-53) explains that the influence of the Sicilian dialect<sup>75</sup> in Verga’s works can be of three kinds: firstly, the strength of the dialect appears fused with that of the writer’s literary style; secondly, the dialect can prevail over the Italian and Verga’s style and can therefore appear excessive, inappropriate and unnecessary; thirdly, the dosage of the dialect is defective so that it may allow the persistence of high register and Tuscan variants, which are employed inappropriately in the case of peasants’ or lower-class speeches.

In *I Malavoglia*, the influence of the Sicilian dialect can be found, as Masiello (1972: 102) says, especially at syntactic and structural level, more than at the lexical and morphological ones, because this usage would be stylistically and formally in harmony with the objective and realistic representation of the “folkloristic soul of the village”. Verga’s language has often the rhythm of the Sicilian dialect. This can be seen, for instance, in the several dialectal calques (Romano 1983: 62-63), for example in the repetitive use of *che* from the Sicilian



*ca* used as a conjunction: “Comare Venera la Zuppidda, per confortare comare la Longa, le andava dicendo: – Ora mettetevi il cuore in pace, *che* per cinque anni bisogna fare come se vostro figlio fosse morto, e non pensateci più” (*M*, Chapter I, 11).<sup>76</sup> In other cases, Verga translates some Sicilian dialectal expressions or sayings literally into Italian, for example *comandare le feste*, from *cumannari li festi*, in “Prima veniva lui [Padron 'Ntoni], il dito grosso, che comandava le feste e le quarant'ore” (*M*, Chapter I, 7-8),<sup>77</sup> or “Chi fa credenza senza pegno, perde l'amico, la roba e l'ingegno” (*M*, Chapter III, 36), from the Sicilian *cui fa cridenza, senz'aviri pignu, perdi la robba, l'amicu e lu 'ngegnu*.<sup>78</sup>

The translations and the calques based on the Sicilian dialect are often puzzling and unclear semantically and syntactically. Semantically, for example, Verga employs the expression “pagarsi col violino” in “c'era anche compare Agostino *Piedipapera*, il quale colle sue barzellette riuscì a farli mettere d'accordo sulle due onze e dieci a salma, da pagarsi ‘col violino’ a tanto il mese” (*M*, Chapter I, 14),<sup>79</sup> which is not clear at a first reading, and as Raya (1962: 40) says, can be explained with *pagare a rate* “to pay in instalments”. Syntactically, many unclear sentences and expressions are related once more to the calque based on the Sicilian *ca* (conjunction and pronoun, while *cca* is an adverb) into Italian *che*. As Raya (1962: 40) explains, this *che* could be often omitted.<sup>80</sup>

As a matter of fact, the usage of *che* from the Sicilian *ca* as a conjunction is also very frequent, as Raya (1962: 60) discusses in the following example, in which *che* stands for *mentre* “while”: “Compare Rocco ha il cuore contento, disse dopo un pezzetto dalla sua finestra Alfio Mosca, che pareva non ci fosse più



nessuno” (*M*, Chapter II, 31).<sup>81</sup> The Sicilian *ca*, as Ciccia (1967: 44) argues, can also mean *poiché*, *quando*, and *dove*. In “giusto in quel tempo anche Luca prese il suo numero alla leva [...], e se ne andò a fare il soldato senza tanti piagnistei, che ormai ci avevano fatto il callo” (*M*, Chapter VII, 77),<sup>82</sup> *che* stands for *poiché* “because” (Ciccia 1967: 45).

Finally, the influence of the Sicilian dialect at the lexical level can be found in the usage of some names and titles, which are modified by the dialect: for example, we find *gnà*, originally *gna* (extra accent by Verga), Sicilian for *signora*, “madam”, employed for lower-class women (Raya 1962: 78); *massaro*, “*contadino non bracciante*”, “peasant”, but not “day labourer” (Raya 1962: 78); and *zio* and *zia*, “uncle” and “aunt”, used in Sicilian – and also in Sardinian – to address a person of a certain age and experience and not just a relative.<sup>83</sup> The influence of dialect can also be found in other nouns, for example *nocciouli*, from the Sicilian *nuciddi*, *noccioule*, “hazelnuts”, for which Verga maintains the masculine form instead of the feminine employed in Italian (Raya 1962: 54 and 79-80).

The language of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* can be described as more traditional and less innovative than the one employed in *I Malavoglia*.<sup>84</sup> Raya points out the numerous revisions that Verga carried out after the first publication of the novel in *La Nuova Antologia* and its first edition by Treves in 1889, something that did not occur in the case of *I Malavoglia*. Despite the similarities between the two novels at the lexical level, differences are to be found at the syntactic one. *Mastro-don*

*Gesualdo* is characterised by a regular and rich language, more traditional and fluent, which has lost the peculiarities that distinguished *I Malavoglia* from other contemporary works. With the exception of a few episodes, like the crisis that leads Baroness Rubiera to paralysis, or some characters' portraits, or the employment of local expressions such as "*santo diavolone!*", the language of the novel has become less captivating. This especially characterises the dialogues among the nobles, which have partly lost the immediacy of those of *I Malavoglia*. Raya (1962: 67) refers to a "bourgeois involution", to a decline of Verga's language in this later stage of his career. In *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, as Masiello implies (1972: 113), language and style become the instruments of demystification of reality, thus highlighting its corruption and cracks. This is carried out in the frequent characters' portraits, especially in those of the decadent aristocracy,<sup>85</sup> which highlight their grotesque and abnormal characteristics. Petronio actually sees "a social comedy" in this novel (1972: 131).<sup>86</sup>

In *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, Verga's language has also become more analytical and organised. The paratactic constructions that characterised *I Malavoglia* are much less common, while clauses have become shorter and separated by means of commas and semicolons. Instances of lists and detailed descriptions are also frequent, and as Luperini says,<sup>87</sup> they are often related to the representation of the characters' belongings, for example their houses. As regards point of view, it appears varied and as Pirodda (1989b: 144-147) says, it is often that of the agent, occasionally that of a group of people, or that of a collective and public voice, which reflects the point of view of the community.

As in other works, Verga shows in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* his predilection for verbs, which emphasise the characters' activities and energies, as in: "e il giovane del paratore [...] correva su e giù per l'impalcato della musica [...], schiodando, martellando, buttando giù i festoni e le ghirlande di carta" (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter III, 50).<sup>88</sup> Pleonasm is also common in this novel.

Instances of imprecations are very frequent, and highlight the characters' Sicilian passionate attitude towards life. Gesualdo often employs *santo e santissimo!* as in: "- Roba da fare andare in aria tutto il quartiere!... santo e santissimo!... E me la mettono poi contro il mio muro; perché loro non hanno nulla da perdere, santo e santissimo!..." (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter I, 7),<sup>89</sup> and "*santo diavolone!*" (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter V, 79).<sup>90</sup>

References to animal behaviour also recur in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, but they appear more frequently in the form of similes, as in: "Bianca allora si rivoltò inferocita, simile a una chiocchia che difende i pulcini" (*MdG*, Part III, Chapter III, 257),<sup>91</sup> which highlights the mother's protective attitude towards her daughter, and surprisingly, a different side of Bianca's usually mild and passive temperament.

The use of proverbs is also more circumscribed in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* than it is in *I Malavoglia*. Instances are: "Chi va all'acqua si bagna, e chi va a cavallo cade. Ma sinché non v'è uomini morti, a tutto si rimedia" (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter V, 83),<sup>92</sup> or: "Anche l'asino quando è stanco si corica in mezzo alla via e non va più avanti..." (*MdG*, Part I, Chapter V, 84);<sup>93</sup> the latter example occurs in Gesualdo's speech in slightly different forms throughout the novel, and does not

have the same function of defining the characters as in Padron 'Ntoni's case. Gesualdo's usage of proverbs foregrounds his popular, low class origins.

Thus, it can be argued that the language of *I Malavoglia* appears more spontaneous, realistic and therefore closer to a 'language of the people' than the one employed in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. The role of the Sicilian dialect, although inferior to the usual generic expectations related to regional fiction, is more relevant in the first novel, especially at syntactic level, and the use of proverbs, nicknames, animal similes and colloquialisms in general contributes to a more realistic representation of the Sicilian fishing community. It is in this sense that we may argue that the language of *I Malavoglia* partially satisfies the linguistic conventions of regional fiction, and that, in being so innovative, it can also be seen as an *avantgarde* linguistic experiment.

It is more difficult to define the language of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* as a 'clear-cut' example of the one usually found in a regional novel. Verga's 'regression' to a more traditional and standard style in this novel, which rarely recurs to dialect, and which found a wider success among his public and critics, might be attributable to his choice of adapting the language to the socially higher community group portrayed in it. Perhaps, the reproduction of the local dialect in *I Malavoglia* was a choice linguistically too innovative for the public of the time, and forced Verga to regress to a more standard and readable language in later works such as *Mastro-don Gesualdo*.

## 11.8 Conclusion

The analysis of Verga's *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* has provided some interesting results. Firstly, it has highlighted the difficulty in circumscribing a novel to a single fictional sub-genre.<sup>94</sup> For example, *Mastro-don Gesualdo* could be considered a biographical novel, as Petronio does, with a very strong realistic and regional dimension. In fact, some of the major characteristics of regional fiction are to be found in these two novels. They include the strongly identified and circumscribed local settings of Aci Trezza and Vizzini, which belong to the author's native region, and which have a fundamental influence on the characters' lives and on their community in general. In fact, the villages of Aci Trezza and Vizzini are portrayed realistically and accurately, also in terms of their traditions, religious celebrations and even superstitions. However, the representation of the landscapes and settings in general does not appear as frequent and emphatic as it generally is in regional fiction, especially as *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is concerned, and it is always inseparable from the characters' perspective or associated with the representation of their property. In this sense, the focus on the two communities and on the incessant activity carried out by their members may be seen as sufficient to characterise the environment as 'regional'. The setting also appears more lyrical and romantic in *I Malavoglia*, and more realistic and concrete in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, and the protagonists' attachment to it is particularly poignant in Padron 'Ntoni, Mena and Mastro-don Gesualdo.

A realistic language, which is sometimes characterised by the employment of Sicilian dialectal features and expressions in *I Malavoglia*, but which is also



contaminated by Tuscanisms, is also present. However, the style and language of these two regional novels understandably undergo some developments: while in *I Malavoglia* the style appears more influenced by spoken language and certainly closer to the native Sicilian dialect especially at syntactic level, in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* this 'everyday language' element is confined to Gesualdo's and the lower-classes' language, while Isabella's is more aulic, refined and romantic. Moreover, in the later novel, the space assigned to proverbs and calques from Sicilian is certainly inferior to the one in *I Malavoglia*, and the influence of the Tuscan dialect appears even stronger and more relevant. This is also in harmony with the typology of the characters portrayed in the novels. In fact, the social status of many of the protagonists of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is higher than that of those of *I Malavoglia*, and therefore their employment of dialect and colloquialisms is less frequent. For this reason, the same characters occasionally appear less locally identifiable in the later novel, although their *sicilianità* surfaces in their passionate and strong temperament.

Moreover, to these characteristics, it could be possible to add the motif of conflicting relationships both within the family and the community, caused by the search for better economic conditions and by the disintegration of familial archaic values and honesty in general. Related to this is the contrast between the country and the city which often defines regional fiction, and which also emerges especially in *I Malavoglia*. In the protagonists' actions, the conflict between the old and the new surfaces in both novels. While in *I Malavoglia* some hope is left for the preservation of those family values in Alessi and Nunziata's promising

future, in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* Isabella, who survives her father, is not willing to protect his hard-conquered property and success. As the next chapters will show, this element is also common to most of Deledda's, Hardy's, and Lawrence's regional works, and will prove fundamental for the economy of their novels.

In conclusion, Verga's *I Malavoglia* can be considered a combination of the sub-genres of the social, the realist and the regional novels, while *Mastro-don Gesualdo* shows elements of the realist, the biographical and of the regional novels. In this way, both works could also be regarded as examples of Kent's 'epistemological text', in particular *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. These novels also respect some of the conventions of regional fiction detected in the first chapter, specifically the circumscribed setting and the representation of local culture in both novels, and the characters' typology and the colloquial, and 'dialectally-influenced' language in *I Malavoglia*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Translation 165: “‘The worst thing,’ Mena finally said, ‘is to leave your own town, where even the stones know you, and it must break your heart to leave them behind on the road.’”

<sup>2</sup> Specifically on *Padron 'Ntoni*, as a letter to Treves dated 21 September 1875 demonstrates (Cattaneo 1963: 157). The project of *il ciclo dei Vinti* is also discussed in another letter to Verga's friend Salvatore Paola Verdura dated 21 April 1878 (Cattaneo 1963: 161-162).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Romano 1983: 30, who quotes Spinazzola 1977: 183.

<sup>4</sup> Among them, “La Lupa” and “Fantasticheria”: cf. Luperini 1968: 60. On *I Malavoglia*, Romano 1983: 50.

<sup>5</sup> Translation 7: “There was a time when the Malavoglia were as thick [*sic*] as the stones on the old Trezza road.”

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Romano 1983: 32-33 and 41, and Pirodda 1976: 111.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Muñiz Muñiz 1989: 118-119.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Petronio 1990: 64-65.

<sup>9</sup> For example, in the novel are mentioned the various new taxes or proposed ones – the inheritance tax, the one on salt, and the one on beasts of burden. Moreover, even Garibaldi and the Italians are criticised, respectively by Donna Rosolina (*M* 44, translation 42) and mastro Zuppiddo (*ibid*).

<sup>10</sup> According to Renda 2003: 870, in Eastern Sicily the rebels asked for the abolition of all taxes according to the Spanish constitution.

<sup>11</sup> Translation 185: “Every labourer wanting his own portion of land! big fish and small fry, all together. They say that the son of the king is one of them: the Duke of Calabria, no other.”

<sup>12</sup> On the revolts of 1820 and 1848-49 cf. Correnti 1999: 508-517.

<sup>13</sup> Translation 383: “‘We’ve got to make a demonstration, you understand? – Shout that we want Pio Nono and liberty as well. – If we don’t the peasants will turn on us. And we must join in. We mustn’t give a bad example, good God!’”

<sup>14</sup> Translation 392: “Gentry and plebeians, after the first shock, had become all one family. Now the gentry were fervent protectors of liberty: priests and friars with the crucifix on their breast, or the cockade of Pius IX, and with muskets on their shoulders.”

<sup>15</sup> With the exception of the revolution against the duty on pitch, in which especially the women take part.

<sup>16</sup> As Lawrence suggests, the title of *don* can also carry ironic connotations and can be employed ironically for members of the low classes: see his translation of *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, “Biographical Note”, vii.

<sup>17</sup> For example, cf. Snell 1998: 1 and 35, and De Meijer 1985: 277-278.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Verga's explanation of the origins of *Storia di una capinera* to his French translator, Édouard Rod, which is taken from Édouard Rod, *Gens et choses de Sicilie* (*Cosmopolis*, riportato dalla *N. Antologia* del 1° settembre 1898), and quoted in Russo, *Giovanni Verga*, 102-103. Verga explains that his family and he had found refuge from a cholera epidemic in their property in Vizzini, that he became close to the local farmers, and that he remembered all those youthful impressions in his maturity and try to fix them in writing.

<sup>19</sup> De Meijer, however, questions the role of Verga's folkloristic research, especially as the popular tales and songs are concerned. According to him, Verga had known them since his youth, and therefore it is possible to consider these readings a ‘revision’, a recollection of images from his youth (Cf. De Meijer 1963: 123-124). Cf. Verga, *Lettere a Luigi Capuana*, Letter 26 “Titolo: *I Malavoglia?*” Catania, 17 maggio 1878, 92-94 and Letter 34 “Ideale artistico” Catania, 14 marzo 1879, 112-114. On the linguistic and folkloristic researches in Verga, cf. Letter 26 (above); Letter 36 “Proverbi siciliani” Catania, 10 aprile 1879, 120-121; and Letter 37 “Cicco e Cola” Catania, 20 aprile 1879, 122. For other letters, cf. Gherarducci and Ghidetti 1994: 73–154.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Luperini 1968: 79 note 9. Also cf. Verga 1975: 93-94, letter dated 17 May 78: “Pel *Padron 'Ntoni* penso d’andare a stare una settimana o due, a lavoro finito, ad Aci Trezza onde dare il tono locale. A lavoro finito, però, e a te non sembrerà strano cotesto, che da lontano in questo genere di lavori l’ottica qualche volta, quasi sempre, è più efficace ed artistica, se non più giusta, e da vicino i colori son troppo sbiaditi quando non sono già sulla tavolozza.”

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Greco Lanza, in Verga 1992: 206 and Luperini 1968: 212.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Luperini 1968: note 4, 212 for his references to Verga's letter to Capuana dated 17 May 1878 (mentioned above) and to De Roberto's *Casa Verga*, which contains useful information of Verga's research on Bourbons and Palermo upper classes in the first half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>23</sup> Translation 168: "After the nets were in the water, he [...] crossed his arms and gazed off into the distance, way up there where all people did was have a good time and never work".

<sup>24</sup> Translation 165: "'The worst thing,' Mena finally said, 'is to leave your own town, where even the stones know you, and it must break your heart to leave them behind on the road. 'Blessed is the bird that makes its nest at home.'"

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Verga, *Lettere a Luigi Capuana*, 112-114, Letter 34 "Ideale artistico" Catania, 14 marzo 1879: "Anch'io faccio assegnamento su *Padron 'Ntoni*, e avrei voluto, se la disgrazia non mi avesse perseguitato sì accanitamente e spietatamente, darvi quell'impronta di fresco e sereno raccoglimento che avrebbe dovuto fare un immenso contrasto con le passioni turbinose e incessanti delle grandi città, con quei bisogni fittizii, e quell'altra prospettiva delle idee o direi anche dei sentimenti. Perciò avrei desiderato andarmi a rintanare in campagna, sulla riva del mare, fra quei pescatori e coglierli vivi come Dio li ha fatti."

<sup>26</sup> Translation 430-431: "As soon as Don Gesualdo was fit to travel, they put him in a litter and set off for the city. It was a rainy day. The houses of note, and the faces of his acquaintances, which hardly turned to look at him, passed by the windows of the litter [...]. And he threw himself back, with his heart swollen because of all the things he was leaving behind him, the muddy road he had traversed so often, the church-tower lost in the mist, the cactus plants striped with the rain which threaded down on either side of the litter."

<sup>27</sup> Translation 248: "So Master 'Ntoni went to the hospital in Alfio Mosca's cart [...], though he didn't say a word, the poor sick man kept looking everywhere [...]. All down Black Lane, passing the house by the medlar tree and crossing the piazza, Master 'Ntoni kept looking around him, to stamp it all on his mind."

<sup>28</sup> Translation 437: "And then his heart swelled to see the sparrows squabbling on the tiles, the sun dying on the cornice without ever coming as low as his windows. He thought of the dusty roads, the fine fields gold and green, the twittering along the hedges, the beautiful mornings when the furrows steamed! – And now! – And now! –"

<sup>29</sup> Translation 441: "Send me back home. I want to die there where I was born."

<sup>30</sup> Also cf. Ragonese 1977: 102-103.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Luperini 1968: 79 and 79-85 on the late romantic, decadent and *crepuscolari* images vs. the realistic ones in the landscapes of *I Malavoglia*. *Faraglioni* are isolated crags in the sea. Spelt *fariglioni* in the novel (for example 33 and translated as "Fariglioni rocks", 31).

<sup>32</sup> Translation 30: "The stars were sparkling more brightly, almost as if they were catching fire, and the Three Kings, with their arms outstretched like Saint Andrew on the cross, glittered above the Fariglioni rocks. The sea snored softly at the end of the road, and at long intervals you heard the creak of some cart passing in the dark, jolting over the stones, traveling about the world which is so large that even if you could walk and walk forever, day and night, you'd never get to the end of it. And yet there were people going about the world at that hour who knew nothing about Compare Alfio, or the *Provvidenza* out at sea, or the Feast of the Dead – so Mena thought as she waited for her grandfather on the landing."

<sup>33</sup> The sea is often humanised throughout the novel, as it were a character in itself. This is illustrated in the opening of Chapter III, 33, translation 31, where the beginning of the tempest in which Bastianazzo finds his death is presented, and the 'mooing' of the sea is certainly peculiar.

<sup>34</sup> Translation 158-159: "All over the village you saw nothing but people carrying nets on their backs and women seated on their doorsteps grinding bricks; and before every door stood a row of kegs, so a man's nose had a feast when he walked down the street, and a mile from town you could smell that Saint Francis had sent them his bounty. All they talked about were anchovies and brine, even at the pharmacy, where they fixed up the world in their own fashion".

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Greco Lanza in Verga 1992: 207.

<sup>36</sup> Translation 73-74: "Growling still, he went off at the ambling pace of his mule, under the burning sun; a sun which split the stones now, and made the stubble crackle as if it was catching



fire. At the gully between the two mountains he seemed to enter into a furnace; and the village on top of the heights, hanging above the precipices, scattered between enormous rocks, mined with caverns which made it seem suspended in the air, blackish, rusted, appeared abandoned, without a shadow, with all the windows wide open in the heat, like so many black holes, the crosses of the church-towers trembling in the sun-dark air. The very mule panted, covered with sweat, climbing the steep road." Also cf. later on in the novel, 65-66, translation 80.

<sup>37</sup> Translation 84-85: "He went out to take the air. He sat down on one of the sheaves near the door, his back against the wall, his hands hanging between his knees. The moon must have been already high, behind the mountain towards Francoforte [*sic*]. All the plain of Passanitello, at the mouth of the valley, was lit up with a gleam like dawn. Little by little, with the spreading of that gleam, even in the river-hollow the sheaves began to show, gathered into heaps like so many stones in rows. Other dark objects moved across the slope, and as the wind travelled there came the heavy, distant sound of the cattle-bells, as the beasts went down slowly, easily towards the torrent [...]. In the yard the high rick, still dark, seemed crowned with silver, and in the shadow you could distinguish dimly other sheaves in heaps; other cattle were chewing the cud; another long stripe of silver came upon the roof-ridge of the store barn, which loomed immense in the dark."

<sup>38</sup> Also cf. Fiorentini 1991: 365-379.

<sup>39</sup> Also see Luperini's analysis in 1968: 148-150.

<sup>40</sup> Translation 240: "When a man leaves his village, he'd better not come back, because while he's away everything changes, and even the faces that look at him are changed, and he feels that he has also become a stranger".

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ciccio 1967: 84.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *I Malavoglia*, Chapter IX, 115, 117 and 130, translations 112, 114 and 126. A related tradition is the hair partition of the future bride by the future mother-in-law or the closest relative from the fiancé's side. Its origins, according to Ciccio 1967: 88, are medieval. However, in *I Malavoglia*, Mena's family does not choose comare Zuppidda to perform this rite, but, for economic reasons – that is, the debt of the lupines – comare Grazia, Piedipapera's wife, which causes the former a great unhappiness and anger (cf. *M*, Chapter IX, 116, translation 113).

<sup>43</sup> Ciccio's comments are based on Giuseppe Pitrè, *Usi natalizi, nuziali e funebri* (Palermo: Clausen, 1879), reprinted in Pitrè, *Usi e costumi, credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano*, vol. II, Ediz. Naz., 1952, and quoted in Ciccio 1967: 87. On Sicilian wedding traditions cf. Pitrè 1978b: II, 33 (on hair partition) and 39 (on the groom's presents to the bride, including hair ornaments).

<sup>44</sup> Quoting Luigi Russo in Verga 1955: 272. The Sicilian *comparatico* is also described in Pitrè 1978b: II, 158, 255 and 278 (for this tradition in other regions cf. 282).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ciccio 1967: 90 and especially Romano 1983: 27: "è il pranzo del 'cuònsolo', portato dai parenti o dagli amici in occasione dei lutti, in uso in Sicilia". Also discussed in Pitrè 1978b: II, 230-231.

<sup>46</sup> On the Sicilian customs of the Ascension, cf. Ciccio 1967: 94.

<sup>47</sup> Also cf. Ciccio 1967: 113-114. Cf. *M*, Chapter X, 145, translation 140: "the herb vinegar of the 'Seven Thieves'. *MdG*, Part II, Chapter III, 173, translation 218.

<sup>48</sup> On Sicilian religious and pagan celebrations cf. Pitrè 1978a: 22.

<sup>49</sup> Translation 52: "Viva the Patron Saint! Viva Saint Gregory the Great!" – In the crowd below in the square was the canon-priest Lupi, howling like one possessed, in the thick of the peasants, and gesticulating towards the balconies of the Sganci mansion, his face upturned, calling at the top of his voice to his acquaintances".

<sup>50</sup> For these three types of superstitions, cf. respectively *MdG*, Part II, Chapter V, 201, translation 253; *ibid.*, Part I, Chapter V, 87, translation 108; and *ibid.*, Part II, Chapter III, 169, translation 213.

<sup>51</sup> Both the usage of animal similes and of nicknames, even though not carried out in dialect, can nevertheless be seen as a local, regional custom, especially as nicknames are concerned. This is confirmed by Pitrè 1978b: II, 382.

<sup>52</sup> Also cf. Pirodda's analysis in 1976: 112-124.



<sup>53</sup> For an interesting discussion of the community of Aci Trezza, the contrast between the Malavoglias' ideology and that of the other community members and between city and country values, cf. Paladini Musitelli 1981: 221-235.

<sup>54</sup> On the internal conflicts of the Malavoglias also see Romano 1983: 65-66 and 82-88.

<sup>55</sup> For an interpretation of *I Malavoglia* as the family myth, cf. Giannantonio 1991: 111-123. Also cf. Luperini 1991: 207-213 for Verga as the 'debunker' of the family.

<sup>56</sup> Pirodda also believes that the narrator's perspective is still 'popular' and does not coincide with that of the author or is very close to it, like many critics have claimed. What has changed is the social level and the environment which is represented. Cf. 1989b: 138-139.

<sup>57</sup> On gestures and Sicilian people cf. Pitre 1978b: 342.

<sup>58</sup> Apart from Pirodda 1989b, also cf. Sipala 1991: 145.

<sup>59</sup> Greco Lanza shares Lawrence's definition of Gesualdo as a Greek in Verga 1992: 211.

<sup>60</sup> On Gesualdo's character, cf. Russo 1934: 292-319, especially 301.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. for example Raya 1950: 299-300.

<sup>62</sup> Translations 86: "'Stick to what you can do -'", and 287: "Everybody as he is born."

<sup>63</sup> Translation 110: "You're the outsider - you're the enemy, what the deuce!"

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Raya 1962: 23: "l'è", "cotesti", and the various diminutives of the "gallant rhetoric". An example of "l'è" can be found in *M*, Chapter XII, 198, translation 189.

<sup>65</sup> Also cf. Raya 1962: 39-40 for a discussion of the *scorie linguistiche*. Translation 8: "Then came Maruzza herself, or La Longa, a tiny woman who kept busy weaving, salting anchovies, and bearing children, like a good housewife."

<sup>66</sup> *Almanaccando* is translated as "cooking up" (110). Ciccina (1967: 42) also mentions "bastingaggio" (*M*, Chapter IX, 121) (*M*, translation "rigging" 118), "mulinava" (*M*, Chapter XIII, 214), (translation "kept telling himself over and over" 204); "buccinavasi persino che onde", etc. in "buccinavasi persino che onde farle dei regali si fosse fatto prestare dei denari da questo e da quello" (*MdG*, Part II, Chapter IV, 192), translation 241: "It put him in such a state that he would have borrowed money wherever he could, in order to make her presents".

<sup>67</sup> In *MdG* scutrettolando (Part II; Chapter III, 171), "wagging her tail" (215) scutrettolava (Part II, Chapter V, 195), "wagging her hips" (245).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Salibra 1994: 228: "un toscanismo 'automatico'".

<sup>69</sup> On this aspect of the novel, cf. Romano 1983: 37-40. Translations respectively 37: "'Oh, what a tragedy!' said the people on the street. 'And the boat was loaded! More than forty onze worth of lupins.'" And 38: "The worst of it was that they'd bought the lupins on credit".

<sup>70</sup> Also cf. Ciccina 1967: 46-47 on this linguistic feature in *I Malavoglia*.

<sup>71</sup> Translation 203: "The sun was there for everyone, and the shade of the olive trees to cool you off, and the piazza to stroll in, and the church steps to sit on and chat, and the highway to see the people go by and to hear the latest news, and the tavern to eat and drink in together with your friends."

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Cecchetti in Verga 1964: xxii.

<sup>73</sup> Translation 8: "Master 'Ntoni also repeated certain sayings and proverbs which he had heard from the old folks, because, as he put it, 'the sayings of the old folks never lie.' For instance: 'Without a man at the tiller the boat can't sail.' - 'You've got to be a sexton before you can be the Pope.' - Or: 'Stick to your trade, you may not get rich but you'll earn your bread.' - 'Be satisfied to be what your father made you, if nothing else you won't be a rascal.' And many other wise maxims."

<sup>74</sup> This fixedness is discussed in Ciccina 1967: 59-67 and also in Cirese 1976: 14-32.

<sup>75</sup> It is presumably the Catanese-Syracusan dialect, a sub-variety of Eastern Sicilian, which belongs to the Central-Eastern Sicilian group. This classification is taken from Ruffino 2001: 38, who follows the one proposed by the Sicilian dialectologist Giorgio Piccitto in the 1950s.

<sup>76</sup> Translation 11: "To comfort La Longa, Comare Venera Zuppidda kept telling her: 'Now put your heart at rest, because for five years you've got to act as if your son were dead, and just forget about him.'"

<sup>77</sup> Translation 8: "First came the old man himself, the thumb, who commanded when to feast and when to fast".

<sup>78</sup> Translation 38: “‘he who gives credit without security, loses his wits, his friend and his property’”. For the translation of Sicilian sayings in *I Malavoglia*, cf. Romano 1983: 63.

<sup>79</sup> Translation 14: “and Compare Piedipapera was there too, and with his joshing got them to agree on two onze and ten a *salma*, to be paid at so much per month.”

<sup>80</sup> As in the proverb he quotes: “Fa il mestiere che sai, *che* se non arricchisci camperai.” (*M*, Chapter I, 8) [italics mine], translation 8: “‘Stick to your trade, you may not get rich but you’ll earn your bread.’”

<sup>81</sup> Translation 29: “‘Compare Rocco is always happy,’ Alfio Mosca said after a while from his window, though it looked dark and empty.”

<sup>82</sup> Translation 75: “Just at that time Luca had also drawn his number in the draft – and a low, poor devil’s number it was. When he left for the King’s navy there wasn’t much weeping and wailing, because by now they’d all become used to it.”

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Raya 1962: 82, and Baglio 1991: 321.

<sup>84</sup> For the language in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, cf. Raya 1962: 69-74.

<sup>85</sup> See those of Fifi Margarone or Baroness Rubiera, analysed in Masiello 1972: 113-114.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Petronio 1972: 131.

<sup>87</sup> On the language in this novel, cf. Luperini 1968: 144-147.

<sup>88</sup> Example quoted in Raya 1962: 57. Translation 61: “and the lad of the man in charge of the decorations, who was running up and down the band-stand [...], pulling out nails, hammering, throwing down the festoons and garlands of paper.”

<sup>89</sup> Translation 5-6: “‘Stuff to set fire to all the neighbourhood! – Saints and blessings! – And so they put it against my wall; because *they’ve* got nothing to lose, saints and blessings! –’”.

<sup>90</sup> Translation 97 “‘No! No!’”.

<sup>91</sup> Translation 326: “Then Bianca turned fierce, like a hen defending her chickens”.

<sup>92</sup> Translation 102: “If you go out in the rain you’ll get wet, and if you travel on horseback you’ll have a fall. But since nobody’s met their death, everything can be mended.”

<sup>93</sup> Translation 104: “Even a donkey when he’s done up lies down in the middle of the road and won’t go any further.”

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Chamberlain & Thompson 1998: 2 and Thomashevsky 1978: 55.

### Chapter III: Grazia Deledda and the regional novel

Aiutino questa piccola lavoratrice  
che ha consacrato la sua vita e i  
suoi pensieri alla Sardegna, e che  
sogna ad ogni istante di vederla se  
non più conosciuta, liberata  
almeno dalle calunnie d'oltre  
mare.<sup>1</sup>

#### *III.1 An introduction to Grazia Deledda's life and literary career. The plots of Elias Portolu and Canne al vento*

Grazia Deledda was born in Nuoro in 1871 into a family of the petit bourgeoisie. Like most Sardinian women in those times, she was allowed to attend only primary school, but she later received private tuition, and soon showed her love for literature and a vocation for writing. In fact, already in 1888, her first short story, "Sangue sardo", "Sardinian Blood", was accepted for publication by the editor of the magazine *Ultima Moda*. Her first literary attempts were opposed by her family and criticised by the *Nuorese* environment, as Dolfi (1979: 15) confirms. A female writer was certainly not approved of by the conservative local society: for example, the tragic love stories represented in Deledda's works were considered as autobiographical, and not as the writer's invention. Deledda, however, was not discouraged by this criticism: in fact, by the end of the nineteenth century, she had already written several novels, for example *Fior di Sardegna* (1892), *Anime oneste* (1895) which also benefited from Ruggiero Bonghi's preface, *La via del male* (1896 and revised edition 1916), *Il tesoro* (1896), *La giustizia* (1899), and *Il vecchio della montagna* (1899 in *La Nuova Antologia*, 1900 Roux and Viarengo). She had also compiled some collections of short stories, like *Nell'azzurro* (1890), *Racconti sardi* (1894), *L'ospite* (1897), *Le*

*tentazioni* (1899), the poetic work *Paesaggi sardi* (1897), and collaborated with various literary periodicals, in particular on the subject of Sardinian folklore for Angelo De Gubernatis, which led to the publication of *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro in Sardegna* (1894-1895).

Deledda visited Cagliari for the first time in 1899, where she met her future husband, Palmiro Madesani, whom she married in 1900. The couple soon moved to Rome, which became their permanent residence, and where Deledda also wrote her major works. As Miccinesi argues (1975: 40), Deledda had in fact dreamed of leaving Sardinia for mainland Italy, and Rome in particular, also to attend the Italian literary circles of the time. The desire of experiencing life outside the native place was also shared by Verga, Hardy, and Lawrence. Although she led a reserved life, which was dedicated to constant daily writing and to the education of her two sons, Deledda also met and befriended many contemporary writers and artists, as is also demonstrated by her numerous letters. She won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1926, which was awarded to her on 10 December 1927, and she died of cancer ten years later, in 1936.

Her most famous and successful works were published in the twentieth century and include, apart from *Il vecchio della montagna*, *Elias Portolu* (1903), *Cenere* (1904), *L'edera* (1908), *Colombi e sparvieri* (1912), *Chiaroscuro* (1912), *Canne al vento* (1913), *Marianna Sirca* (1915), *L'incendio nell'uliveto* (1918), *La madre* (1920), *Il segreto dell'uomo solitario* (1921), *Annalena Bilsini* (1927), and the incomplete autobiographical novel *Cosima* (1936), published posthumously.



Various debates have arisen about Deledda's style and her belonging to a specific literary movement. Some critics have considered her a *verista* or realist, a naturalist, or even a Romantic, a decadent writer and a symbolist. Some have claimed that Deledda's works had been probably influenced by French Realist and Naturalist writers, whose works also constituted her earliest reading.<sup>2</sup> This seems plausible, especially for the influence of environment and heredity on people's lives that can be witnessed in many of her works (Cuddon 1991: 574-575). Others, Muoni (1992: 272), for example, have compared Deledda to Lord Byron or Chateaubriand for her passionate defence of what she saw as the unknown and unjustly afflicted island of Sardinia, for her frequent use of primitive ethnic elements and picturesque description of the Sardinian landscape. Her works have been associated with Dostoevskij's, in the description of common people. More importantly, D. H. Lawrence (1955: 292 and 294), who also wrote the preface for the English version of *La Madre*,<sup>3</sup> has also compared Deledda to Thomas Hardy and the Brönte sisters for the typology of her settings, as we shall see in more detail in chapter five. Verga, according to Sapegno (Deledda 1971: xiii), also appreciated and compared Deledda's *Cenere* to one of Berthold Auerbach's rustic stories.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of these different comparisons, and of a certain development from the Naturalistic themes of her first works to the symbolist ones of her later production, it is probably more appropriate to say that Deledda's works cannot be singularly defined as realistic, romantic, naturalistic, or symbolist. In fact, they often combine elements of these styles with the writer's creativity, which found



inspiration, for most of her works, in her local community, Nuoro, and its nearby region, *Barbagia*.

As regards the two novels that will be discussed in this chapter, *Elias Portolu* and *Canne al vento*, the former was firstly published in *La Nuova Antologia* in 1900 and later by Roux and Viarengo in 1903. The book depicts the life of a local Sardinian community located in the town of Nuoro and in its neighbouring countryside, including the area near Lula, where the feast of St. Francis (of Lula) takes place. It is the story of Elias, a young shepherd, who returns to his family of *prinzipales* (owners of *tancas* and cattle) in Nuoro, after having spent some time in a mainland Italian prison for petty theft. He falls in love with his brother's fiancée, Maddalena, who reciprocates, but unsure whether to reveal his love or not, he hopes that by becoming a priest he will escape temptation and sin. Nevertheless, despite his efforts, Maddalena and he start an affair, which makes Elias postpone taking his vows, and leads to Maddalena's pregnancy. She later gives birth to a baby boy, Berte. Maddalena's husband Pietro dies unexpectedly while Elias has already entered the seminary. Free to love Maddalena, and despite her pressures, Elias nevertheless renounces his 'earthly love' and officially becomes a priest, while Maddalena is engaged to a wealthy family friend. At the end of the novel, Maddalena and Elias' son dies, thus breaking all links between his parents, and symbolically expiating their sin with his premature, innocent death.

*Canne al vento* firstly appeared in *L'illustrazione italiana* in 1913, and was published by Treves in the same year. It presents the story of the decaying Pintor family in the Sardinian village of Galte in the Baronia area. After the death of their father, Don Zame, involuntarily caused by the servant Efix, and their youngest sister Lia's escape, Ruth, Ester and Noemi Pintor face a difficult financial situation and are assisted by the same Efix. Lia's son, Giacinto, arrives from the mainland only to bring confusion, further debts, and humiliation to the family. Noemi develops incestuous feelings for him, which are partially reciprocated. However, after Giacinto leaves Galte, and later announces his imminent marriage with Grixenda, a local poor young woman, Noemi eventually agrees to marry her rich cousin Don Predu mainly to support herself and Ester and to save their family name.<sup>5</sup> The story is intermingled with Efix's constant efforts to help the three sisters, and especially with his desires for expiation, which takes place in the form of a pilgrimage from sanctuary to sanctuary. Efix, however, realises that his real expiation should be done in Galte, near the Pintor ladies; therefore, he returns there and dies on the day of Noemi and Don Predu's marriage.

### *III.2 Grazia Deledda and fictional sub-genres*

As regards the relationship between Deledda and fictional sub-genres, and especially the regional novel, critics have had once again different opinions. In the case of *Elias Portolu*, for example, Giacalone (1965: 35) argues that the psychological investigation and analysis carried out by Deledda in this novel

dominate over the environment and the landscape, and are combined in Elias' moral anguish. His fragility and passionate temperament derive from his native environment, as also his shyness and indecisiveness caused by the native prejudices and customs. By using the same ancient and local motifs of the Sardinian tradition as the supposed causes of Elias' psychological turmoil, Deledda makes a *romanzo d'ambiente* become a profound psychological novel.

For Cerina (1992: 123), *Elias Portolu* is not a *verista* (realist) novel despite its local setting and the representation of Sardinian customs. The recurrent rituals, such as the countryside religious festival of St. Francis of Lula, provide the local colour of *Barbagia*, but their external characterisation does not imply a regional interpretation of the novel. Cerina (1992: 114-115) also argues that the omniscient narrator, and his frequent interventions, comments and clarifications on customs and Sardinian lexemes and sayings that characterise *Elias Portolu*, are related to modalities specific of oral stories and narrative and to popular novels. Also associated with the oral tradition is the important role of magic formulas, and premonitory dreams. In Cerina's opinion (1992: 118), Deledda offers a realistic representation of the *Barbagia* world through a detailed representation of beliefs, objects, behaviours, and also by the employment of adjectives such as *caratteristico*, *primitivo*, *arcaico*, *selvaggio* to satisfy the need and request for exotic material. However, according to the same critic (1992: 119), Deledda does not highlight or discuss the 'struggle for life', as Verga did, or simply the sociological aspects and economic dynamics of the local environment. The few references to the Portolus' jobs are generic and serve to highlight the family

structure and relations and their crisis, which will lead to the drama of the novel, and to more emphasis on religious celebrations and rites such as the sheep-shearing (Cerina 1992: 119-120). In fact, both Deledda and Verga often display a generic and superficial representation of the historical or sociological background, or even of the settings of their novels. Cerina's comments are certainly acceptable in the case of *Elias Portolu*, where the Portolus are owners of pastureland and cattle, and therefore are financially prosperous. The 'struggle for life', however, is in my opinion presented and analysed in *Canne al vento*, where the Pintor sisters are decadent noblewomen struggling to make ends meet, and Efix and also Giacinto are victims of the poor conditions of the three sisters. As a matter of fact, the declining status of the aristocracy is also represented in Verga's *Mastro-don Gesualdo*.

Moreover, De Giovanni (1993: 44-45) claims that the first chapter of *Canne al vento* has all the characteristics of the *feuilleton*, such as the independent plot, and the suspense of each chapter published in instalments. She also quotes Pancrazi who is against the concept of Deledda as a regional writer in the negative sense of the term – in the sense of the limitedness and closure often associated with this type of fiction – but who emphasises her appropriate, moderate use of regionalist elements which eventually lead to more universal themes.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of fact, we could certainly argue that Deledda's regionalism is well amalgamated with more universal themes such as relationships, family values and the realisation of the individual. Indeed, it often functions as the *basis*, the starting point of what can be eventually seen as universal themes and problems.

Pilia is against the approach that does not consider Deledda as a regional writer, and confirms that Deledda's region of the spirit actually corresponded to the real Sardinian environment, and partially to its real historical and economic conditions.<sup>7</sup> Miccinesi accepts the idea of Deledda's regionalism as related to her choice of native Sardinian themes and locations, but is against the negative connotations associated with the term *regionalism* (1975: 77-78), because according to him, Deledda was able to make her Sardinian themes universal (1975: 15), as Pancrazi and others also believed. Susini (1951: 35) considers Deledda's regionalism as the starting point of her works, but emphasises the occasional excessive use of it, while for Sotgiu (1974: 97-98) Deledda's Sardinia functions as a *pretext* for the construction of the universal individual human or familial drama. The Sardinian landscape and setting exasperate that drama. The Sicilian one had a similar function in Verga, as often did Wessex in Hardy, especially in the case of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*, and also perhaps the mining and agricultural areas of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire in Lawrence.

For Bárberi Squarotti (1974: 132), the pastoral elements of Deledda's novels are taken from or inspired by the (classical) pastoral genre and modes. He sees the influence of naturalistic elements in Efix's death (1974: 146-147), while the form of the apologue, on which many novels are based, presents anti-naturalistic elements, and the theme of the journey functions as the expiation of the 'infraction' of the societal code (1974: 149-152). Deledda portrays her region as a place where certain moral situations and conscience conflicts are still plausible,



but she cannot be considered as a regional realist writer, because her aspirations were higher than regional ones and her fictional production belongs to the fairy-tale genre (*romanzo-fiaba*) (1974: 149-150). The interest in fairy-tales was actually very important in the late nineteenth century, as Capuana's various collections of fairy-tales demonstrate, as well as the more widely-known production of children's literature of Collodi and De Amicis.<sup>8</sup> As we shall see later in this chapter (III.6), elements of the fairy-tale genre, such as the presence of fairies, pixies, and spirits are to be found particularly in *Canne al vento*, especially at the beginning of the novel (Chapter I). Finally, Botticini (1992: 197) emphasises the exotic, magic and mythic realism in Deledda.

Once again, these different opinions on the fictional sub-genres employed by Deledda and on her regionalism emphasise the vast but polarised 'regional versus non-regional' debate that the writer's production has originated. As the rest of this chapter will show (in particular III.3), the regional themes, settings and linguistic features are in my opinion fundamental elements of Deledda's works and ideology. In fact, although it is sometimes possible to find conventions of other fictional genres in her novels – for example, the biographical novel in *Elias Portolu*, for its focus on the eponymous protagonist –<sup>9</sup> the regional elements are ever present. In fact, the universal themes portrayed in them – tormented love affairs, family contrasts, and so on – assume a regional dimension that should not be neglected.

### III.3 The themes of Deledda's regional novels

Deledda's desire to promote her native island was always manifest.<sup>10</sup> She was deeply influenced in her writings by her Sardinian background, not only when she lived in Sardinia, but also after she moved to the mainland. In Deledda, the regional theme is constant throughout her career. However, this desire to illustrate Sardinia and the everyday life of its inhabitants, and to promote it to local and national readers, was carried out especially in the second phase of her literary career, after her first sentimental and romantic works. From the initial stages in which it was influenced by Naturalistic motifs, the *region* gradually became associated with the writer's memories and fantasy, as Lombardi (1979: 87) also explains. Later, approximately from the 1920s onwards, as Contini (1982: 47) confirms, her works gradually became more focused on decadent and psychological themes, and the representation of Sardinia functioned more as regression into the writer's childhood, as the reproduction of her memories and feelings of nostalgia.<sup>11</sup> Nostalgia, as we have already seen, seems a recurrent motif among regional writers.

Deledda's regional novels in general, as well as *Elias Portolu* and *Canne al vento*, usually focus on the description and analysis of the characters' unhappy and opposed passions and feelings, which appears to be favoured by the circumstances of the local Sardinian environment, and by the specific characteristics of their archaic and traditional family and society. Her stories usually begin with the description of people's emotional and instinctive sides. Then she presents an escape, a dispute or a trauma that threatens the family peace.

Alternatively, there is a secret that must be kept, which is related to a previous and almost forgotten crime, as in *Canne al vento*. Through her use of delaying effects and postponements, Deledda makes the conclusion function as an expiation, a catharsis, as Berte's and Efix's deaths in *Elias Portolu* and *Canne al vento* respectively do. Another aspect of her writing is that she also tended to load the main characters of her works with her own emotions, sympathising with them, and seeing the external world from their point of view. Therefore, she did not apply Verga's technique of the narrator's impersonality. On the contrary, the narrator's interventions, his/her participation to the characters' actions, and even the explanation of Sardinian cultural and linguistic aspects frequently surface in her works: for this reason, she cannot be considered a *verista*.<sup>12</sup>

One of the most important features of her first Sardinian novels, for instance, *La via del male*, is the strong sense of morality that pervades the protagonists' actions. It is linked to the Sardinian ethos, whose depiction is another characteristic of Deledda's first works. However, especially from *Elias Portolu* onwards, the Sardinian people's lives are also meant to represent the lives of people in general, with their universal problems.

The picturesqueness of the Sardinian landscapes and the use of certain tonalities of colour constitute an important aspect of Deledda's novels, and are used to emphasise certain moral, psychological, or physical features of the protagonists.

According to Wood (1995: 63), the central themes of Deledda's works are the contrast between old and new, the individual and the moral order, the

consequences of transgression, and especially passionate love. The same critic argues that in *Canne al vento* man finds in Nature “an image of his own existential condition, a reflection of his own painful, suffering sense of reality, which recalls the work of Thomas Hardy” (1995: 67).

Moreover, another dominant note of Deledda’s works is the sense of sin that enfolds the general atmosphere of the narration, and which might be seen as an influence from the Bible. For the writer, however, “Non esiste il peccato, esiste solo il peccatore, degno di pietà perché nato col suo destino sulle spalle”.<sup>13</sup> This declaration explains the struggle that most of the main characters of her works have to make in order to free themselves from this oppression, this sense of unworthiness and contempt towards themselves and their actions. This is particularly manifest in the characters of Elias and Efix, and partially in Giacinto.

Among the themes discussed by Deledda in her works are also the struggle between masters and servants, the crisis of the familial institution, and the anxiety of the individual and of the intellectual, especially of those who have experienced the world outside Sardinia and who are not able to reintegrate themselves with the local community, as initially is the case of Elias Portolu.<sup>14</sup> As the previous chapter has shown, the crisis of the family also characterised some of Verga’s works, including *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, and was generally common in nineteenth-century literature. Moreover, Elias Portolu is similar to ’Ntoni Malavoglia for having experienced life outside his native community and consequently for having developed higher hopes and aspirations that are left unfulfilled. Hardy’s Clym Yeobright, as we shall see in the next chapter, is left

disillusioned by his life outside Egdon Heath, while Lawrence's Cyril Beardsall and William and Paul Morel find their lives in the city more rewarding.

As already shown, Deledda often declared her knowledge of the Sardinian shepherds and farmers' lives, and of the customs and traditions of her native area of Sardinia, *Barbagia*, in her letters, interviews and articles on Sardinian folklore. Her portraits of Sardinia and Sardinians reveal the misery, meanness, and wickedness that characterised many levels of Sardinian society. In this way, she exposed to her readers the serious difficulties that impaired the lives of her fellow islanders. Deledda does not present a solution to their miserable conditions, to the inequalities and selfish interests that vitiated and degraded their lives, nor any form of direct social conflict, possibly because, as Sotgiu (1986: 285-286) explains, in her works she expressed the conservative ideology of the local landowners, who did not aim at changing the *status quo*. Thus, a sense of resignation, pessimism and fatalism dominates her works, although the hope for a better world and a better life finds its way in the conclusion of most of her stories. As in Verga's Sicily, destiny and fate were also fundamental elements of the Sardinian attitude to life: they influenced people's reactions to misfortunes and unhappy circumstances, and acted as if they could justify them at a superior level of existence. These positions are perfectly exemplified by Deledda's characters: in fact, most of them do not seem able to react to their misfortunes, or to take decisions because they appear to be under the influence of these supernatural forces, which control their lives.



Thus, although it plays a central function in her works, Deledda's regionalism is not of a social or political kind, but of a *moral* kind, as Momigliano explains (1954: 79-82). In this sense, the problematic lives of the Sardinian inhabitants that she represented in her works are not purely folkloristic or ethnographic, but on the contrary are employed to describe and discuss what the same Deledda probably saw as universal human issues. The region thus becomes a metaphor for the universe. This view is also supported by Fuller, who summarises the role of Deledda's regionalism in the following terms:

Unlike the Abruzzi for Gabriele D'Annunzio, Sicily for Verga or Naples for Matilde Serao and other Verist writers, Sardinia for Deledda was something more than a literary expedient [...]. Basically it was her sole inspiration. (2000: 65)<sup>15</sup>

#### *III.4 The historical and social background of Deledda's novels*

Which are the causes of the sense of resignation, and of the incumbent pessimism that can often be found in Deledda's novels? They are certainly related to the history of the island. In fact, as the Sardinian historian Sotgiu (1974: 61) states, the majority of Deledda's works are set in Sardinia during what should have been a changing and revolutionary phase of its history, mainly just after the Italian unification. Before that, the Savoy dynasty, which had acquired the island from King Philip V of Spain in 1718, like many of the previous conquerors, did not provide effective improvements to the local society and economy; on the contrary, it impaired the lives of many peasants and shepherds even further. Subsequently, Sardinia became part of the *Regno Sardo-Piemontese* in 1847. The situation improved neither after then, nor after the Italian unification in 1861. Political

power was left unchanged, and the introduction of Piedmontese taxation, and especially the unjust exploitation of the mining, dairy, cereal and forestry resources worsened and impoverished the already miserable life-style conditions of the majority of the Sardinian people. This general poverty and the unequal treatment of Sardinian affairs were also the main causes of the phenomenon of banditry, often represented in Deledda's works, as well as in Verga's: in fact, this phenomenon also affected Sicily and Southern Italy in general. Banditry, as Sotgiu explains (1974: 77-84), was the anarchic answer to an unequal society, in which the wealth of the middle classes was the result of the expropriation of the poor ones. Moreover, banditry was also the consequence of the general underdevelopment of Sardinian society and the incoherent reaction of its most undeveloped part to the changes that took place in taxation and in the productive system.

To sum up, the late nineteenth-century Sardinian agro-pastoral world constitutes the historical and cultural background in which many of Deledda's novels and short stories are set, even though the historical and political events of the time are rarely represented or discussed, as in *Elias Portolu*.<sup>16</sup> This novel, in fact, does not contain any historical reference.<sup>17</sup> No mention of the chronic land problem is made, or of the antagonism between agriculture and sheep breeding in the wild related to that issue, despite the Portolus' engagement in both these forms of production. In fact, the Piedmontese government (Sotgiu 1986: 14), and later the Italian one, had promoted the reduction of the areas assigned to pastures in favour of the re-organisation and increase of the land for agricultural purposes.

Historical references are however included in *Canne al vento*, which is set between spring 1912 and November 1913, and in which the War of Libya and the construction of the Panama Canal are mentioned.<sup>18</sup> The phenomenon of usury is also described in this novel,<sup>19</sup> and was particularly widespread among the Sardinian agricultural labourers, and the salaried workers (Sotgiu 1986: 329). Finally, the novel also contains references to migration from Sardinia, an important circumstance of the time (Sotgiu 1986: 407 and 419), especially to America (*CV*, Chapter V, 71, translation 60), and to the problem of malaria, which was also the object of discussion of the first Sardinian regional congress of 10-15 May 1914.<sup>20</sup>

Financial difficulties, the problems with the law, and the hidden inner passions of most of the protagonists of Deledda's books clearly represent the troubled reality of Sardinia at that time. It is true that some local intellectuals made every effort to bring attention to these problems, to encourage the local politicians to improve the general conditions of the island, and to give voice to the Sardinians' suffering. However, by depicting in her works a reality characterised by unfair social relations in a positive way, as Deledda did, she unfortunately favoured the maintenance of the *status quo* (even though involuntarily) by the Italian and Sardinian local governments, who did not see this 'portrait' as a threat; and she exposed the island's 'evils' from within, something that many Sardinians never forgave her for.

### *III.5 Sardinian landscapes and setting*

As regards the representation of the Sardinian landscapes in Deledda's novels, they accompany and strengthen every emotional and dramatic moment of the characters' lives. Obviously, they also intensify the Sardinian setting, making the latter even more distinctive and unique. The representation of the Sardinian landscape includes the description of local mountains and flora, often associated with ancient tales and superstitions. The setting is usually that of Deledda's native area, *Nuorese* or *Barbagia*.<sup>21</sup> The latter is a hardly accessible area located in the centre of Sardinia, which became famous for its resistance to invaders, and especially for being the bandits' favourite refuge.

According to Giacobbe (1974: 55), the *Barbagia* described by Deledda is not the 'real one', but her own representation of it, based on her memories, and modified by her fantasy and imagination. However, in my opinion, and as the "Gruppo di studio universitari nuoresi" also argues (1974: 194-196), Deledda's landscapes are inspired by concrete and recognisable places and are related to the various seasons and to the representation of the characters' feelings.<sup>22</sup> This interpretation is also supported by Miccinesi (1975: 62-69),<sup>23</sup> Bárberi Squarotti (1974: 133-134) and Lavinio (1992: 77),<sup>24</sup> and is also a characteristic found among some of Verga's landscapes, as well as in Hardy's and Lawrence's.

According to Piromalli (1968: 45), in *Elias Portolu* the archaic Sardinian pastoral world is transported into a superior reign of poetic fascination, of musical atmosphere, which harmonises the motif of human weakness with those of guilt

and expiation. This work exists as an inner story of the struggle between temptation and the desire to do good.

The most recurrent element of the landscape that Deledda chose to represent, especially in *Elias Portolu*, is the *tanca*. As King (1994: X) says,

A *tanca* is a vast, enclosed stretch of pasture land for pigs, sheep, goats and cows. It was a sign of wealth and prestige to be the owner of a *tanca* – not to be confused with a mere sheepfold.

The *tanca* is not only part of the island landscape, but it also symbolises the shepherd's life. In fact, it is the place in which he lives and works during most of the year; it is, together with the sheep and cattle it lodges, the main source of profit for him and his family; it is also a traditional place, to celebrate the sheep-shearing, for example. It is often depicted as solitary, like most of its inhabitants. A *tanca* is accurately presented at the beginning of Chapter IV of *Elias Portolu*; its description also contains an example of pathetic fallacy in the “murmuring” of the water:

La *tanca* dei Portolu era stata anni prima diboscata, e adesso stendevasi aperta, vasta, battuta dal sole. Solo qualche sovero qua e là sorgeva fra il verde delle erbe, delle macchie, dei rovi; nelle distese umide la vegetazione era morbida e delicata, profumata di menta e di timo [...]. La *tanca*, sebbene piana e senza bosco, aveva recessi segreti, roccie e macchie; il corso d'acqua in certi punti scorreva fra boschetti di sambuchi, dove il sole appena penetrava, formando laghetti verdi e misteriosi, circondati e tramezzati di roccie, sulle quali l'acqua infrangevasi mormorando. (*EP*, Chapter IV, 84)<sup>25</sup>

Apart from describing a *tanca*, Deledda often provides images of other typical Sardinian landscapes, especially nocturnal ones.<sup>26</sup> She also chooses to describe each season and to connect it with the shepherds' activity in *Elias Portolu*; for example, it is in winter that shepherds' lives are at their hardest.<sup>27</sup>



A final example worth presenting is the following one, in which the narratorial voice condemns the presence of pits, and their degrading effect on the landscape, as Lawrence also does in both *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers*: “Ed ecco, d’un tratto, il sublime paesaggio profanato e desolato dalle bocche nere e dagli scarichi delle miniere” (*EP*, Chapter II, 53).<sup>28</sup> Deledda was very much in favour of the preservation of Sardinian intact landscapes, and seemed to condemn the intervention of mainland business companies that would for example commission and exploit the extraction of minerals (especially silver, lead and zinc).

Set in the poor village of Galte, most probably Galtelli, or according to some critics Orosei, in the Baronia area, *Canne al vento* and the representation of the local environment and community give off a sense of sadness, weakness and decay that permeates the landscape and the Pintor house, as in the following example, marked topographically by the reference to Galte’s mount and castle:

Ecco a un tratto la valle aprirsi e sulla cima a picco d’una collina simile a un enorme cumulo di ruderi, apparire le rovine del Castello [...]; ed ecco il cono verde e bianco del monte di Galte solcato da ombre e da strisce di sole, e ai suoi piedi il paese che pare composto dei soli ruderi dell’antica città romana. Lunghe muriccie in rovina, casupole senza tetto, muri sgretolati, avanzi di cortili e di recinti, catapecchie intatte più melanconiche degli stessi ruderi fiancheggiano le strade in pendio selciate al centro di grossi macigni [...]. Le strade erano deserte e le rocce a picco del Monte apparivano adesso come torri di marmo. (*CV*, Chapter II, 15-16)<sup>29</sup>

Efix’s emotions and feelings find solidarity in the landscapes of the novel. His nostalgic memories of the ‘good old times’ are mixed with the difficult, present conditions of the local village and community. The best example of the

participation of Nature in human feelings and of pathetic fallacy is the following, in which Nature seems to comfort Efix with the smiling spring and stars:

La nebbia si diradava, apparivano profili di boschi neri sull'azzurro pallido dell'orizzonte; poi tutto fu sereno, come se mani invisibili tirassero di qua e di là i veli del mal tempo, e un grande arcobaleno di sette vivi colori e un altro più piccolo e più scialbo s'incurvarono sul paesaggio. La primavera nuorese sorrise allora al povero Efix seduto sulla porta della chiesetta. Grandi ranuncoli gialli, umidi come di rugiada, brillarono nei prati argentei, e le prime stelle apparse al cadere della sera sorrisero ai fiori: il cielo e la terra parevano due specchi che si riflettessero. (*CV*, Chapter XIV, 176-177)<sup>30</sup>

The theme of the journey from the native community that characterised both *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is mentioned in *Elias Portolu* with reference to the protagonist's experience in the mainland prison. It also reappears in *Canne al vento* and particularly in Efix's expiatory pilgrimage and in Giacinto's journey from Civitavecchia to Galte, and from there to Oliena and Nuoro to find better job opportunities. In fact, as Sole (1992a: 103, 109 and 113) affirms, *Canne al vento* is actually a metaphor of the journey for expiatory purposes. Efix finds it extremely hard to leave his little farm, and even more so to abandon the Pintor sisters. His pilgrimage is anticipated in the course of the novel, and covers most of the second part of the book.

Efix firstly goes to see Giacinto in Nuoro, then moves on to some local religious feasts, like the one of the Madonna di Valverde, and it is then that he joins a blind beggar who has just lost his companion. Together they visit other sanctuaries, but Efix eventually realises that his real expiation will be to go back to Galte and to persuade Noemi to marry Don Predu.

Like Efix, Giacinto returns to Galte to face his aunts and to marry Grixenda. Although his experience outside Galte has been a positive one – he found a job and the strength to repay his aunts' debts – he nevertheless realises, also with the help of Efix's intervention, and that of Grixenda's brother Zuannantò, that his place is near Grixenda, and goes back to her. His decision to settle down in his mother's native village also functions as his final repudiation of his immature and irresponsible behaviour, which characterised him when he lived in the mainland and at his arrival in Sardinia. Giacinto, unlike his mother, eventually integrates himself with the local community, and should eventually participate in its welfare.

Finally, the contrast between the local village and community and the external world is also present in Deledda's novels. In *Elias Portolu* it takes the form of the opposition between Sardinia and the Italian mainland (*il continente*) experienced by Elias when he spent time in prison, and also between the strength and pride of Sardinian people versus the weakness of mainland Italians. The latter is often emphasised by Zio Berte, as in: “siamo uomini, noi, non siamo bambocci di formaggio fresco come i continentali, anche se essi sono guardiani di uomini...” (*EP*, Chapter I, 36).<sup>31</sup> As we have already seen, in *I Malavoglia*, mainland Italy was instead seen as the place where one could achieve happiness and wealth, according to 'Ntoni.

In *Canne al vento*, the opposition between the good values of Sardinia and the evils of mainland Italy is again shown for example by Giacinto, a non-native Sardinian, who does not have a good opinion of mainland Italy and Italians, as he

tells Efix (*CV* 59-60, Chapter II, translation 49-50). However, the young man also misses the better social life and style of the mainland. To the Sardinia versus mainland Italy contrast, Deledda adds in this novel the antithesis Galte versus Nuoro – that is, country versus city or better town, a theme that usually recurs in regional fiction. Nuoro, unlike Galte, is seen as the place where it is possible to find work and lead a good life, as Noemi tells Giacinto after his arrival to Galte:

Io sono stata a Nuoro molti anni fa, a cavallo. La strada è bella, e la città è bella, sì; l'aria è buona, la gente è buona. Là non ci sono febbri, come qui, e tutti possono lavorare e guadagnare: Tutti i forestieri son diventati ricchi, lassù, mentre, qui, pare d'essere in luogo di morti... (*CV*, Chapter III, 43).<sup>32</sup>

### *III.6 Customs and folklore: Sardinian religious feasts and superstitions in Deledda's regional novels*

Deledda's interest in Sardinian traditions is documented in her research for the volume *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro*<sup>33</sup> that she compiled for De Gubernatis. This collection of Sardinian folklore, traditions, superstitions and sayings certainly consolidated Deledda's knowledge on the topic, and proved useful in the writing of her regional production. In fact, most of the traditions and superstitions represented or mentioned in her Sardinian novels and short stories are also catalogued in it.

Thus, the representation of Sardinian culture is a distinctive feature of many of Deledda's novels, as usually is the case in regional fiction. In *Elias Portolu*, its presence is constant throughout the book, and finds its best expressions in the folkloristic descriptions of the religious feast of St. Francis of Lula and of the Nuorese Carnival, in Zia Annedda's magic spells, combined with her strong

religious faith.<sup>34</sup> As regards the representation of the feast of *San Francesco di Lula*, whose official date is the 10<sup>th</sup> of May,<sup>35</sup> but whose celebrations last nine days, Deledda describes its rites accurately, also providing their cultural background:

La chiesa di San Francesco sorge sulle montagne di Lula. La leggenda la dice edificata da un bandito che, stanco della sua vita errabonda, promise di sottomettersi alla giustizia e di far sorgere la chiesa se veniva assolto. Ad ogni modo, vera o no la leggenda, i priori, cioè quelli che dirigono la festa, vengono ogni anno sorteggiati fra i discendenti del fondatore o dei fondatori della chiesa. Tutti questi discendenti, che si dicono anche parenti di San Francesco, formano, al tempo della festa e della novena, una specie di comunità, e godono certi privilegi. I Portolu erano nel numero. (*EP*, Chapter II, 50)<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the social gathering, the desire to break the conventional discretion of Sardinian everyday-life meetings, and the lack of inhibitions especially facilitate Elias and Maddalena's falling in love during the religious festival.<sup>37</sup>

The same could be said about the description of the *Nuorese* carnival, in which Elias, Pietro, Maddalena, and her friends take part at the end of Chapter VI. In this context, women are usually dressed like cats, men like Turks. Carnival, once again, offers the opportunity to socialise and to lose inhibitions: in fact, this is the time when Elias seduces Maddalena.

Finally, when Elias is consecrated a priest and can now say mass, he is celebrated by his family and friends. During this occasion, another traditional custom of Sardinia, the extemporaneous poets' competition, is portrayed (*EP* Chapter X, 180 and 181, translation 177 and 179). In this circumstance, men make up verses on the spot.



In *Canne al vento*, the main religious celebration represented by Deledda is the feast of *Nostra Signora del Rimedio*, “Our Lady of Rimedio”, the description of which occupies many pages of the book. Similarly to the feast of St. Francis of Lula, religious and pagan themes are combined during the celebrations, and once more, it is during this feast that Deledda makes two characters, Giacinto and Grixenda, fall in love. Deledda’s description of the feast is once again detailed, as its introduction demonstrates:

Un gran fuoco di lentischi, come lo aveva veduto Noemi fanciulla, ardeva nel cortile di Nostra Signora del Rimedio, illuminando i muri neri del Santuario e le capanne intorno. Un ragazzo suonava la fisarmonica, ma la gente, ch’era appena uscita dalla novena e preparava la cena o già mangiava entro le capanne, non si decideva a cominciare il ballo [...]. Le dame Pintor avevano a loro disposizione due capanne fra le più antiche (tutti gli anni ne venivan fabbricate di nuove) dette appunto *sas muristenes de sas damas*, perché divenute quasi di loro proprietà in seguito a regali e donazioni fatte alla chiesa dalle loro ave fin dal tempo in cui gli arcivescovi di Pisa nelle loro visite pastorali alle diocesi sarde sbarcavano nel porto più vicino e celebravano messe nel Santuario. (CV, Chapter IV, 47-48)<sup>38</sup>

Many other religious feasts are mentioned in *Canne al vento* during Efix’s pilgrimage.<sup>39</sup> The pilgrimage in Deledda is not a folkloristic event, but the representation of the profound religiosity of her characters; it contributes, together with the landscape, the local history, traditions, and even superstitions to a faithful representation of Sardinia. The devotion of the Sardinian people is also demonstrated by the numerous references to the Bible that can be found especially in the latter part of the novel. The pilgrimage in itself often combines the desire for expiation and protection against sin as in Efix, or the thankfulness for a fulfilled wish as in Elias, with the more profane desire for celebration and amusement. As always, Deledda provides some background information about the

local festivities.<sup>40</sup> Her comments, which are often related to the ones presented in *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro*, usually function as help for her mainland readers who are not familiar with the local religious celebrations.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the religious festivals are the occasion when the local community often gathers together with other communities from the nearby villages, and has the opportunity of socialising outside its own native environment.

In *Elias Portolu* and *Canne al vento* Deledda also describes the Sardinian mourning rites and wedding customs. The former are, according to the author, a dramatic event: in fact, the condolences of relatives and friends last for three days, as shown in *Elias Portolu* after Pietro's death.<sup>42</sup> In *Canne al vento*, Noemi wears Ruth's white headscarf as a sign of mourning.<sup>43</sup> Mourning customs are also part of the local, regional traditions in Verga's novels, for example in the case of Bastianazzo's death and the *cunsolu* visit, but less so in Hardy and Lawrence, despite the death of some of the protagonists of their novels.

Wedding customs, on the other hand, are faithfully represented in *Canne al vento*, where Noemi and Predu's marriage is introduced by the intimate wedding procession, typical of the *Nuorese* wedding.<sup>44</sup> The traditional wedding lunch is also mentioned in *Elias Portolu*, but it is negatively influenced by Elias' illness, and therefore the celebrations are restrained. As we saw in chapter II of this thesis, Verga also represented the customs of the Sicilian wedding in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. The illustration of these rites by the authors, combined with the

landscape and the other folkloristic descriptions certainly foregrounds the regionalism of their novels.

A sense of fatalism and impotence towards the tragic events of life is shared by the majority of Deledda's, Verga's, and Hardy's characters, as we have already seen in the previous chapters. In *Canne al vento*, more than in *Elias Portolu*, the fragility of human beings against sin and destiny is represented by the metaphor, already introduced in the title of the novel, of the reeds fighting in the wind, as the following conversation between Efix and Ester demonstrates:

"Sì" egli disse allora "siamo proprio come le canne al vento, donna Ester mia. Ecco perché! Siamo canne, e la sorte è il vento." "Sì, va bene: ma perché questa sorte?" "E il vento perché? Dio solo lo sa." "Sia fatta allora la sua volontà" ella disse chinando la testa sul petto. (*CV*, Chapter XVI, 205)<sup>45</sup>

In my opinion, divine will or destiny have a more relevant function in this novel than in *Elias Portolu*: in fact, while in the latter it is mainly Elias' weak will-power, and his strong family values that initially stop him from claiming the woman he loves, in *Canne al vento* it is fate that transforms Efix's self-defence against Don Zame into manslaughter.

Another characteristic of folklore is the belief in superstitions and magic, which is also present in Verga's and Hardy's novels, and has an important role also in Deledda's works. In *Elias Portolu*, this is illustrated by Zia Annedda's healing and prophetic rites, like the magic *parole verdi*, which reveal whether an ill person will recover or die.<sup>46</sup> According to Deledda, in the small villages of Barbagia and in Nuoro, people believe in magic and employ spells.<sup>47</sup> Moreover,

the presence of supernatural powers and magic is much more recurrent in the later novel, and is often combined with and assimilated into the representations of the landscapes, as in the initial pages of the novel.<sup>48</sup> The presence of supernatural, animistic and magic elements – the Barons' ghosts, the *panas* (women who died while giving birth), the *ammattadore* (a type of pixie), evil spirits, the *janas* (small fairies), giants, dragoons, and the legendary snake *cananèa* – is intermingled with Christian religious elements, and with the characters' strong faith in God, the saints, and miracles. This is one of Efix's most recurrent characteristics, and also of some of Verga's characters. Deledda, in *Tradizioni popolari di Sardegna*, emphasises this mix: "Le donne portano abitini, medaglie, croci, "rezettas" (Vedi *Usi e credenze per la notte di San Giovanni*), cordoni e reliquie benedette. Grande è il culto per le immagini" (1995: 101-102).

The belief in love spells is contemplated in *Canne al vento*, when Don Predu suddenly becomes easy-going, starts losing weight and one of his servants finds a 'black pin' in his bed.<sup>49</sup> Once again, the representation of these superstitions serves to highlight some of the local beliefs which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, are also shared by some of Verga's characters. The Dorset people represented in Hardy's works, as we shall see in the next chapter, also share this belief in superstition.

Finally, if one compares the results of the representation of the Sardinian culture and folklore in Deledda's works with that of the Sicilian ones in Verga, it is possible to notice some important differences. For example, according to Cirese (1976: 38-39), in spite of Deledda's closeness to the cultural world she portrayed

– in the sense that she was imbued with it, while Verga had to study it – Verga's representation of certain ideological modalities of the Sicilian people seemed more effective than Deledda's insertion of Sardinian expressions in her novels. However, in my opinion, Deledda's strong interest in folklore and local traditions, and her expertise in this field, are certainly manifest in her research for the volume *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro*. Moreover, while Verga researched the Sicilian customs and folklore in order to insert these elements in his Sicilian realist works, and thus for creative and artistic purposes, Deledda expanded her already good knowledge of Sardinian traditions with the prospect of divulging the information she gathered to a more specialised audience, that is, Italian ethnographers and folklore experts that were interested in De Gubernatis' project.

### *III.7 Characters, familial ties, and the local communities*

The representation of Sardinia, its landscapes, customs and the lives of Sardinian shepherds and peasants found in Deledda's novels are obviously interrelated. These characters, of which Deledda initially offers a physical description, especially of their eyes and gaze, generally manifest a quiet, serious, suspicious and meditative attitude, and a pessimistic and fatalistic approach to life. Their natural mistrust and suspicion are the heritage of and the answer to centuries of foreign invasions and rigid colonial domination.

Despite this sense of solitude, suspicion and pessimism, Deledda's characters find refuge in their strong family ties, sometimes referred as the *clan*. The Sardinian family, like Mediterranean families in general, presents a strong



segregation of the masculine and feminine roles, a central and privileged function of motherhood, and a tendency towards kin endogamy according to Ravis-Giordani (1990: 25). However, a certain level of control especially of adolescent women and of their sexuality is generally exercised not only by their adult relatives, but also by the village community.<sup>50</sup> This is also portrayed not only in Verga's *I Malavoglia*, especially in the condemnation of Lia's flirtatious relationship with Don Michele and in Mena's related unmarried destiny, but also in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, where the eponymous protagonist eventually decides Isabella's romantic future to be an arranged marriage with the Duke of Leyra. Like the Sicilian one, the traditional Sardinian family also has a powerful influence on the local social and marital relationships. This is true for *Canne al vento*, where Don Predu's, Giacinto's, and Efix's pressures eventually persuade Noemi to marry the former.

Thus, while the Sardinian familial solidarity can be useful when overcoming financial difficulties or unexpected losses, in most of Deledda's books the *clan* functions as an enemy, as an obstacle to the achievement of happiness. This is perfectly true in *Elias Portolu*. In fact, in Deledda's stories, there is often an open or hidden rivalry within the family, especially when a potential partner is concerned. Moreover, instances of incest or of illicit love relationships are often to be found, and are followed by a sense of sin that needs to be expiated. The frequency of these illicit relationships in Deledda's works was probably related to the limited mobility, the innate diffidence towards foreign elements, to the local

economy, and especially to the strong family and community ties of the areas represented in her novels.<sup>51</sup>

In *Elias Portolu*, the eponymous protagonist is a fragile, effeminate and indecisive young man, who is torn between his faithfulness to his family and particularly to his brother Pietro and his own individual desires that would lead him to claim Maddalena for himself. Deledda repeatedly emphasises Elias' fragility and difference from the other members of his family and community, as the following example shows:

Il più che rideva era lui, il reduce, ma il suo riso era stanco e spezzato, la voce debole; il suo viso e le sue mani spiccavano fra tutte quelle facce e quelle mani bronzine; sembrava una donna vestita da uomo. Inoltre il suo linguaggio aveva acquistato qualche cosa di particolare, di *esotico*; egli parlava con una certa affettazione, metà italiano e metà dialetto, con imprecazioni affatto continentali. (*EP*, Chapter I, 33)<sup>52</sup> (emphasis mine)

Thus, from the beginning of the novel, Elias appears to be different from the rest of his family and community. He is already the outsider who has experienced life away from the native community and is trying willingly to reintegrate himself with both. Like 'Ntoni Malavoglia, he talks about his experience outside the native town – for many reasons a more negative one than 'Ntoni's – and in the course of the novel he also emphasises the good aspects of it, such as the improvement in his education standards (he read many texts, especially the Holy Scriptures during the time he spent in prison) and social skills (like dancing). Unlike 'Ntoni, he does not desire to go back to the mainland, because his family ties are certainly stronger for him than the ones experienced by Verga's character.

In *Elias Portolu*, white and its nuances, for example pale and pearl, are also used to portray Elias himself, therefore conveying different connotative meanings. In fact, white usually carries a connotative, associative meaning related to moral or physical purity. At the beginning of the novel, Elias is white, because he has spent some time in prison. This contrasts with the sun-tanned complexion of his relatives and friends, and of many Sardinians in general.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, he is metaphorically white because he has expiated his crime and is therefore pure. As soon as he starts working as a shepherd again, and falls in love with Maddalena, his complexion becomes once more dark, also metaphorically, because his love is sinful.<sup>54</sup> Finally, after he has decided to become a priest, and has moved to the seminary, he turns white and pale again, not only for the lack of exposure to the sunshine, but especially because he has confessed his sin and promised not to commit it again.<sup>55</sup> In *Elias Portolu*, Elias is often portrayed as an outsider, and his whiteness, together with his weakness, is emphasised by his relatives throughout the book.

His mother Zia Annedda, like Mrs Yeobright in *The Return of the Native* and Mrs Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, has a fundamental role in the evolution of Elias' personality and in his decisions. Deledda pays particular attention to the mother-son relationship, which will predominate in her later work *La madre* (1920), as the following example shows:

anche lui aveva voglia di gridare; sentiva un brivido per le reni, un istintivo ricordo di corse lontane, un bisogno di slanciarsi ancora all'agile galoppo, alla corsa inebbriante e libera; ma il braccio sottile di Zia Annedda gli legava la vita, ed egli non solo frenava il suo istinto di uomo primitivo, ma

rimaneva assai indietro a tutti i cavalieri, perché la polvere da essi sollevata non offendesse la vecchietta. (*EP*, Chapter II, 53)<sup>56</sup>

Zia Annedda symbolises security and protection, and as Dolfi (1979: 99) argues, the first and only safe affective relationship that Elias experiences.

In fact, Elias' love for his family is very strong, especially after his experience in prison. This is shared by his father Zio Berte, another Padron 'Ntoni in this sense, and by Zia Annedda. Kozma (2002: 55), however, sees Elias' father as autocratic and intimidating. Zio Berte, in my opinion, does love his son, and his only fault is to show his feelings in a colourful, slightly aggressive way.

This familial affection makes Elias sacrifice, initially, his love for Maddalena, a passionate, strong-willed woman, to avoid stealing her from his brother Pietro. However, Pietro and Maddalena's marriage is not a happy one, and this fact, plus the strength of his love makes Elias' (and Maddalena's) personal desires overcome those of the family. The news that Maddalena is pregnant also makes Elias happy. However, his paternal desires are frustrated and have to be denied and repressed until the end of the novel, when his son dies, thus 'setting him free'.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, Elias' choice to become a priest is widely accepted and welcomed by the Portolus.<sup>58</sup> However, the fact that a shepherd has decided to become a priest causes some temporary surprise within the local community, which is nevertheless overcome with time: "Due anni sono trascorsi. La gente ha cessato di mormorare, di ridere, di meravigliarsi nel vedere Elias Portolu, l'ex pastore, vestito da seminarista" (*EP*, Chapter IX, 164).<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the real problem is that Elias has never forgotten Maddalena, and still loves her, as he

loves their son. Elias' struggle against his mortal feelings characterises most of the last part of the novel. Even when his brother dies and he could accomplish his dream of becoming Maddalena's husband with the approval of his family (levirate), he opts to continue his expiation and to become a priest. Moreover, if he had decided to renounce his religious vocation and to marry Maddalena, he would have incurred the community's disapproval: "“È tardi, ti dico: lo scandalo sarebbe enorme; mi direbbero pazzo”” (EP, Chapter IX, 178).<sup>60</sup> Thus, Elias constantly appears to be torn between his own desires, and those of his family and of the local community, and he eventually sacrifices his happiness.

In *Elias Portolu*, the local *Nuorese* society directly participates in some of the central events of the novel, such as Elias' return from the mainland, the religious festival of St. Francis of Lula and the mourning rites for Pietro's death. However, it is especially in its solidarity, and in its traditional and conservative values, that its presence is felt. In *Canne al vento*, the poor and declining community of Galte is described and analysed through the words of some of the characters, for example in Ruth's words: "Se il paesetto non dava risorse neppure a quelli che c'erano nati?" (CV, Chapter I, 12),<sup>61</sup> and also through the contrast between Milese's and Don Predu's possessions and the poverty of the Pintor sisters and of Grixenda's family. Another character, Kallina the usurer, plays an important role in the novel, because she is the one who funds not only Efix, but especially Giacinto, and causes great shame and further financial problems to his aunts. We must remember that also in Verga's *I Malavoglia* the usurer Zio



Crocifisso plays a fundamental role in the Malavoglias' financial problems, and influences their destiny. Deledda presents the community of Galte in economic terms:

I personaggi più importanti del paese attraversavano il loro discorso: primo veniva il Rettore, poi la sorella del Rettore, poi il Milese che aveva sposato una figlia di questa ed era diventato, da venditore ambulante di arance e di anfore, il più ricco mercante del villaggio. Seguiva don Predu, il sindaco, cugino delle padrone di Efix. Anche don Predu era ricco, ma non come il Milese. Poi veniva Kallina l'usuraia, ricca anche lei ma in modo misterioso. (CV, Chapter I, 8)<sup>62</sup>

The Pintor family, which belongs to the decadent nobility as do the Traos in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, is instead mainly described by Efix's and Noemi's flashbacks related to her memory of happier times at the *Festa del Rimedio*, and also in Deledda's portrait of the three sisters.<sup>63</sup> Within the Pintor family, two sisters distinguish themselves from the others. The first is Noemi who, as it appears from her own recollections of childhood and youth related to the family's participation in the feast of *Nostra Signora del Rimedio*, has always felt different from her sisters in her desires and interests:

Noemi ricordava di non aver mai preso parte diretta alla festa, mentre le sorelle maggiori ridevano e si divertivano, e Lia accovacciata come una lepre in un angolo erboso del cortile forse fin da quel tempo meditava la fuga [...]. No, ella [Noemi] non ballava, non rideva, ma le bastava veder la gente a divertirsi perché sperava di poter anche lei prender parte alla festa della vita. Ma gli anni eran passati e la festa della vita s'era svolta lontana dal paesetto, e per poterne prender parte sua sorella Lia era fuggita da casa... Lei, Noemi, era rimasta sul balcone cadente della vecchia dimora come un tempo sul belvedere del prete. (CV, Chapter III, 36-37)<sup>64</sup>

It is her reluctance to participate in life added to her father's severity that keeps Noemi more isolated and especially vulnerable to the incestuous attraction she develops for her nephew Giacinto, of whom Deledda foregrounds his difference

from the people of the community, but also his links to it, generated by his mother's descriptions of her native village. This is shown in the next passages:

Appena vide Noemi si tolse il berretto che lasciava l'impronta sui folti capelli dorati, e le sorrise mostrando i bei denti fra le labbra carnose. [...] Gli sembrava di riconoscere il luogo dov'era. Ecco il portico tante volte ricordato da sua madre. (*CV*, Chapter III, 41)<sup>65</sup>

And:

Ogni sua parola e il suo accento straniero colpivano Grixenda al cuore. Ella non aveva ben distinto il viso del giovane arrivato da terre lontane, ma aveva notato la sua alta statura e i capelli folti dorati come il fuoco. (*CV*, Chapter IV, 51)<sup>66</sup>

However, it is Lia who is the real outsider, who breaks away from the archaic community and especially from the oppressive family ties that her father built after his wife's death, and leaves forever her native village, while Noemi remains and settles down there with Don Predu. Lia's escape is once more narrated through Efix's memories – Efix, who fell in love with her and helped her to run away.<sup>67</sup> Like the homonym Lia of *I Malavoglia* and 'Ntoni, Lia Pintor dreams of the outside world:

Gli [to Efix] sembrava di veder ancora donna Lia, pallida e sottile come un giunco, affacciata al balcone, con gli occhi fissi in lontananza a spiare anch'essa cosa c'era di là, nel mondo. (*CV*, Chapter II, 19)<sup>68</sup>

Once more, she represents the struggle of the individual against his/her family values and the community. Her escape causes a scandal within the village and shame and unhappiness to her family. The shame and dishonour experienced by the Pintor sisters is the same one endured by Mena in *I Malavoglia*: these women are victims of their respective sisters' personal, selfish desires and acts, and from the family and the community's point of view they cannot enter the 'marriage

market'. In that case, in fact, they might bring shame to their future husbands. Only in Noemi's case, after many years have passed, does Don Predu overcome these prejudices and proposes to her. Lia Pintor and Lia Malavoglia both leave their family and native place and do not return to them. Nevertheless, Lia Pintor's destiny seems happier than that of Lia Malavoglia. In fact, the former, despite losing the love and respect of her family and community, has managed to create her own family and apparently lead a decent life.

Another important element highlighted in *Canne al vento* is the necessity to marry a man or a woman who belongs to the same social class. In fact, money, and property in general, has a strong influence on the choice of the future husband or wife in Deledda's novels, as well as in Verga's. As we have seen, this happens in Deledda's *Canne al vento*, where Noemi marries her wealthy cousin Don Predu for economic reasons. As De Giovanni (2001: 94 and 1993: 109) also states, in a closed society like that of *Barbagia*, the endogamous union was almost the norm especially among the noble families, because it prevented the dispersion of the family properties. As in the case of Lia Pintor's marriage with a merchant, a man socially inferior to her, Giacinto cannot marry the poor Grixenda according to his aunts' and the community's points of view. Noemi, who De Giovanni sees as a neurotic, a victim of love and psychological pathologies and obsessions typical of the literary heroines of the time, however, develops incestuous feelings for her nephew,<sup>69</sup> which are in part reciprocated by him, as he also confesses to Efix. For De Giovanni (1993: 78), Noemi transfers the resentment she feels for her sister

Lia, who betrayed her with her escape, to Lia's son Giacinto. In spite of her feelings for him, Noemi eventually opts for what family and society consider a less forbidden and more acceptable choice: she marries her cousin, thus guaranteeing the economic survival of the Pintor family. However, Noemi's acceptance of her cousin as her husband seems dictated more by her revengeful feelings for Giacinto and Grixenda's engagement than by tender feelings for Don Predu or just economic interests. In fact, after a first refusal, she eventually consents to marry Don Predu before the marriage of Giacinto and Grixenda takes place.

Thus, class barriers are eventually overcome in this novel. As Dolfi explains (1979: 121-123), the declining nobility is united to the rising bourgeoisie in Don Predu and Noemi's marriage. Moreover, while Zia Pottoi and Don Zame were not allowed to marry because of their different social status, Giacinto (Don Zame's grandson) and Grixenda (Zia Pottoi's granddaughter) are.

The protagonists' attachment to their family and local community is strong also in *Canne al vento*. Efix's fondness for his little farm and work is foregrounded throughout the novel.<sup>70</sup> His attachment also symbolises his affection for the Pintor sisters, who own it. When he is forced to leave this little piece of land, his reaction can be compared to Padron 'Ntoni's love for the house by the medlar tree, but his response is one in which a humanised Nature participates in Efix's pain and 'greets him farewell', thus offering another example of pathetic fallacy:



All'alba si mosse. Addio, questa volta partiva davvero e mise tutto in ordine dentro la capanna [...]. Portò via la bisaccia, colse un gelsomino dalla siepe e si volse in giro a guardare: e tutta la valle gli parve bianca e dolce come il gelsomino. E tutto era silenzio [...]; solo le foglie delle canne si movevano sopra il ciglione, dritte rigide come spade che s'arrotavano sul metallo del cielo. "Efix, addio, Efix addio". (*CV*, Chapter XVII, 212)<sup>71</sup>

On another occasion when Efix has to leave his small farm, the image of the 'nest', *il nido*, common to the idea of the Malavoglias' house in Verga's novel, is employed by Deledda to emphasise Efix's feelings of security and serenity in contrast with the outside world.<sup>72</sup>

As we have seen, what Deledda chose to represent of her native island in *Elias Portolu* and *Canne al vento* were common people and their lives. Deledda's characters, that is, shepherds, peasants, and small entrepreneurs, are certainly regional in their professions and attachment to their native place, with the exception of Lia Pintor. Moreover, even if they did not belong directly to Deledda's social class and environment, they were also certainly closer to it than Verga's characters were.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the Sardinian writer shows her knowledge of the protagonists' lifestyles and working habits, as if she had been in direct contact with the people she chose to portray in many of her works. In my opinion, this proximity between her characters' class and her own certainly helped Deledda in her accurate representation of Sardinia that had constituted her main literary goal since her youth.

Moreover, unlike 'Ntoni and his sister Lia in *I Malavoglia*, her characters are more often re-integrated with their family and native community at the end of



the novels, thus preserving the values that the latter represent, and finding a 'peaceful relationship' with them.

### *III.8 Deledda's language and her use of dialect*

It has been argued that Deledda's language lacks quality and style. Many critics have condemned her use of *sardismi*, that is, words written in Italian but which are calques from Sardinian.<sup>74</sup> Pittau (1974: 171) also sees Deledda's Italian as poor at lexical and grammatical levels. It is true that her prose and style were quite simple and monotonous at the beginning of her literary career, but it is also true that she subsequently succeeded in improving them. Thus, it could be said that her language undergoes several corrections and modifications. The reasons for these changes can be found in her desire to eliminate unnecessary repetitions, generic amplifications, wrong and excessive utilisation of different register levels – a desire which seems to contradict the monotonousness of her prose: Deledda, in fact, wanted her prose and style to be fluent. Moreover, she chose to limit her employment of Sardinian words, idioms and to some extent its syntactic structures in the latter part of her career, in particular after *La madre* (1920). She also varied her use of figures of speech. For example, metaphors become predominant after *La madre*, while similes were frequently employed before its publication. Metonymies and synecdoches, on the other hand, were constantly utilised throughout her career. They often occur in the characters' representation, when a part of their body, usually their eyes or hair or teeth, stands for the whole character.

Despite these several improvements, it is also possible to distinguish some constant features of Deledda's prose, which is plain, harmonious, and simple. Firstly, her preference for parataxis instead of hypotaxis, for which Deledda was certainly influenced by Sardinian, which has a paratactic syntax. Moreover, Lavinio (1992: 75-76) also believes that Deledda's predilection could be related to the transfer from oral narration – that is, spoken language – to a written text. Deledda, in fact, often bases her stories on the ones she heard directly from acquaintances, relatives and friends who visited her family. Parataxis, with its short clauses, is used to give a sense of terseness and compression to the narration. The cohesion of the text is mostly of the lexical kind, and is generally guaranteed by the repetition of the same word, usually a noun or a first name, which is sometimes substituted referentially with the appropriate personal pronoun.

Moreover, Deledda employs free indirect speech often combined with free direct speech and direct speech.<sup>75</sup> The Sardinian writer adopts it mostly to describe the characters' thoughts and reflections; she often presents them in the narrative form of the interior monologue, or in one of the characters' portraits, provided by another protagonist. Sometimes the new sentence begins with the adverb *ecco*, "here (is/comes)", in order to emphasise the change at the level of narration. When the action or the context become particularly dramatic, Deledda moves from free indirect speech to free direct speech or, according to Herczeg,<sup>76</sup> to simple direct speech, in order to make the communication more immediate and emphatic. Deledda uses free indirect speech to lighten the sentence structure, in

accordance to her preference for a simple, paratactic prose, with few conjunctions and subordinate clauses. In this way, the number of short, independent clauses increases, together with that of interrogative and exclamatory ones. According to De Giovanni (1993: 86-87), the use of free indirect discourse is extensive in *Canne al vento*. In *Elias Portolu*, however, the percentage of free indirect speech or thought is more limited and it is used in the case of interior monologues, or for the characters' portraits.

Deledda's register is often spoken, although it is not rare to find certain old-fashioned and pompous expressions, as in Hardy. The dialogues do not carry an important function in her works. According to Bárberi Squarotti (1974: 134-141), they often occur in the form of a few, separated words, the emphasis of which is sometimes increased by their appearance in the interrogative or exclamatory form. The dialogues are not real conversations, but they function as explanations, focusing on the discourse about the characters' reactions when they confront each other.

Another characteristic is Deledda's predilection for adjectives that express colour nuances, something that she had in common with Lawrence. In fact, many critics have analysed this use in terms of colour symbolism.<sup>77</sup> Each colour has, for Deledda, a connotative meaning and function. Green, for example, represents purity, because it is the colour of Nature, and in Deledda Nature is still uncorrupted and primordial. White, instead, is the colour of womanhood; as we have already seen in this chapter, white is also used in *Elias Portolu* to portray Elias himself, therefore conveying different connotative meanings. In other cases,

the colours are in contrast with each other, because they carry antagonistic values, that is, good versus evil, virtue versus sin, innocence versus corruption and so on. Otherwise, the writer chooses different tonalities of the same colour to emphasise the changes that take place in the characters' lives, moods, attitudes or personality. The representation of the Sardinian landscape and nature is also often accompanied by different, mysterious sounds, although Deledda rarely employs synaesthetic effects in her books. Examples of this type of representation are:

Era il grido cadenzato del cuculo, il [sic] zirlìo dei grilli precoci, qualche gemito d'uccello; era il sospiro delle canne e la voce sempre più chiara del fiume: ma era soprattutto un soffio, un ansito misterioso che pareva uscire dalla terra stessa; sì, la giornata dell'uomo lavoratore era finita, ma cominciava la vita fantastica dei folletti, delle fate, degli spiriti erranti. (*CV*, Chapter I, 5)<sup>78</sup>

Another example can be found in *Elias Portolu*:

[Mattia] Credeva ai morti e agli spiriti erranti; e nelle lunghe notti della *tanca*, seguendo il gregge aveva più volte impallidito sembrandogli di veder guizzi misteriosi nell'aria, animali strani che passavano di corsa senza destare alcun rumore, e nella voce lontana del bosco, in quella immensa solitudine di macchie e di roccie, sentiva spesso lamenti arcani, sospiri e susurri. (*EP*, Chapter VI, 120)<sup>79</sup>

Lastly, the use of a nominal style is constant throughout Deledda's works. It consists of substantives closely linked to each other by various kinds of connectives; these nouns are semantically more important than the predicators that accompany them. That is, verbs are used by the writer only to maintain the traditional sentence structure, while nouns convey the meaning of the sentence. Another characteristic of nominal style is the recurrence of a prepositional clause introduced by *con*, "with". Its function is often that of an apposition, and is frequently employed in the characters' portraits. However, this kind of

prepositional clause does not often appear in *Elias Portolu*. Moreover, examples of parallelisms are also very common, and are to be found mainly in the case of appositive constructions.<sup>80</sup>

Dialectal items and culture-specific lexemes and expressions usually play a major role in the language and style of a regional novel. The linguistic culture-specific items in Deledda include the use of Sardinian names and surnames, toponyms, idioms and sayings. All these elements are fundamental, because they emphasise the Sardinian background of the stories.

As Pittau explains, Sardinian is a romance language and not an Italian dialect, like for instance Verga's Sicilian; therefore, Deledda's dialect *Nuorese* is actually a Sardinian dialect and not an Italian one.<sup>81</sup> Regarding the dialect used by Deledda, *Nuorese*, it could be said that it is different from the two main Sardinian dialects, the *Campidanese* and the *Logudorese*, although it shares some characteristics of the latter.<sup>82</sup> It is regarded as an archaic dialect because, like the other central dialects, its evolution was delayed by the lack of contacts between the native population and the conquerors that came after the first Roman invasion.

The use of the Sardinian dialect in Deledda can be divided into different levels. Firstly, it takes place in the usage of Sardinian lexemes, idioms, fixed expressions and even popular songs and poems for which exists a Standard Italian equivalent. In this case, Deledda italicises them in the text, and offers their Italian translation in footnotes or endnotes, or they are glossed in the text itself. An example is the explanation of the word *zio* in "zio Berte" in *Elias Portolu*



(Chapter I, 29), literally “uncle Berte”; after *zio* Deledda inserts the footnote: “In Sardegna il titolo di *zio* si dà a tutte le persone del popolo un po’ avanzate in età” (*EP*, Chapter I, 29).<sup>83</sup>

Secondly, Deledda employs Sardinian lexemes, idioms and fixed expressions that do not have an Italian equivalent. Some of them, like the word *tanca*, have been actually introduced into Standard Italian by Deledda. She usually italicises them, as in the case of *tanca* or *gattòs*,<sup>84</sup> and explains them in footnotes the first time they are used in the text. Otherwise, Deledda inserts the paraphrase of a culture-specific item in the text immediately after its employment. She adopts this strategy especially when the lexeme she translates is the subject of a paragraph, or is frequently repeated in the following pages. See for example the description of the *cumbissia maggiore*:

E i Portolu [...] presero posto nella *cumbissia maggiore*. È questa *cumbissia* una lunghissima stanza, semibuia, rozzamente selciata, col sotto-tetto di canne. Di tratto in tratto, infisso al suolo, c’è un focolare di pietra, e sulle rozze pareti un grosso piuolo. Ognuno di questi piuoli indica il posto ereditario delle famiglie discendenti dai fondatori. (*EP*, Chapter II, 55)<sup>85</sup>

The explanation or paraphrase of the lexeme *cumbissia* is very accurate; the reason why Deledda provides the translation of the above-mentioned dialectal and culture-specific items is also linked to her desire to promote Sardinian culture beyond the island. In fact, by translating them, she explains them and offers their cultural background to her readers.

As concerns Sardinian syntactic and morphological constructions, they are present in the form of Italian calques from the *Nuorese* dialect, and of register or stylistic calques, which are difficult to detect, especially for non-Sardinian native

speakers. The former – the syntactic constructions – generally characterise the dialogues, and often consist of word-order inversions within a sentence or a clause, of the adjective after the noun it refers to, and of personal pronouns. All of them often occur in end-position. The most common inversions are: Verb-Object → Object-Verb: “Nulla ti do” (*EP*, Chapter II, 58),<sup>86</sup> instead of “Non ti do nulla”; Auxiliary-Participle → Participle-Auxiliary: “Arrita Scada, sentito hai?” (*EP*, Chapter I, 38),<sup>87</sup> instead of “Arrita Scada, hai sentito?”; Verb-Predicate → Predicate-Verb: “Uomini siamo, Elias” (*EP*, Chapter IV, 97),<sup>88</sup> instead of “Siamo uomini, Elias”, or “galantuomini siamo!” (*EP*, Chapter I, 32).<sup>89</sup> In *Canne al vento*, the inversion verb + impersonal verb can be found in “Adattarsi bisogna” disse Efix versandogli da bere” (*CV*, Chapter IV, 53);<sup>90</sup> the inversion direct object + verb in “Zia Pottoi! Pazienza bisogna avere” (*CV*, Chapter XIII, 156);<sup>91</sup> the employment of the auxiliary *avere* “to have” instead of *essere* “to be” with reflexive verbs in “Come te lo hai fatto il tumore?” (*CV*, Chapter XIV, 181).<sup>92</sup> These inversions and postponements are typical of the dialogues, and probably derive from spoken Sardinian. It is also possible to find examples in which the theme of the sentence is postponed in end-position. It mostly occurs in direct speech, as in the postponement of the subject *noi* “we” in the sentence: “Siamo una famiglia, una casa di uomini, noi” (*EP*, Chapter I, 38).<sup>93</sup> Other examples of Sardinian syntactic calques are the usage without article of nouns that indicate a social or personal condition, so that they are used as personal names, and the employment, in exclamatory clauses, of a demonstrative pronoun instead of the article, in order to strengthen the value of the clause in itself.

As regards morphology, one example offered by Secci (1968: 148), but in a different text, is the use of the word *estate*, “summer”, as a masculine noun, while in Standard Italian it is a feminine one; this usage is probably affected by the correspondent *Nuorese* equivalent *istiu*, which is masculine. The latter – register and stylistic calques – may consist in the repetitive use of certain pronouns,<sup>94</sup> or in the choice of certain verbal tenses. In fact, the use of verbal tenses and moods is also influenced by Sardinian. This is particularly evident in the conditional sentences: in fact, Italian has three types of conditional sentences, which contain different pairs of tenses. Deledda, instead, often adopts the Sardinian *Nuorese* version, in which there are only two types of conditional sentence, and both employ the indicative but in different tenses, and literally translates them into Italian.

Sardinian curses<sup>95</sup> and superstitions, vocatives, antiphrastic ironies, and witty rhymed sayings are also frequently identifiable in Deledda’s novels. Pittau (1974: 155-173), for example, presents instances of whole sentences written in Sardinian (e.g., “*su bellu mannu*”, “il bellissimo”, “the most beautiful”, but literally, “il bello grande”, “the beautiful big one”); the use of a kind of “vocative complement”, in which there is the elision of personal names until the tonic syllable, as in: *Anto*’= Sardinian *Antoni*, Anthony.

Lastly, proverbs and idiomatic expressions are also recurrent as in Verga’s *I Malavoglia*, especially in *Elias Portolu*: Zio Berte seems to repeat the italicised expression “siamo uomini, noi, non siamo *bambocci di formaggio fresco* come i

continentali” (*EP*, Chapter I, 36), or its variation: “*Uomini di formaggio fresco!*” (*EP ibid.*).<sup>96</sup> Another example is the proverb: “Ogni piccola macchia porta piccole orecchie!” (*EP*, Chapter IV, 95).<sup>97</sup> Deledda provides the original Sardinian version in a footnote. The Italian version is actually a calque from the *Nuorese* dialect, that is: *cada mettichedda juchet orichedda*.<sup>98</sup> The frequent different invocations to St. Francis are maintained in the dialectal forms, as in: “*Santu Franziscu bellu!*”<sup>99</sup> Moreover, the wish that family and friends address to Elias Portolu after his return from prison, “Fra cento anni un'altra, fra cento anni un'altra... – mormorava zia Annedda piangendo” (*EP*, Chapter I, 31),<sup>100</sup> is described by Deledda in *Tradizioni popolari di Sardegna* (187). Finally, minor characters are often referred to by their nicknames, as in other peasant or primitive cultures,<sup>101</sup> and as in *I Malavoglia*.

The employment of Sardinian linguistic elements illustrated above is related to Deledda's search for realism in her novels, so that they could reproduce the dialogues of native Sardinians, who were supposedly speaking in dialect,<sup>102</sup> but without impairing the understanding of the non-Sardinian readers. This is why she recurs to Sardinian items mostly in the dialogues, while their use in the descriptions, the reports of actions, or in the writer's metalinguistic comments – that is, in the expository and narrative discourse – is unusual. This certainly contradicts Bárberi Squarotti's declaration that the dialogue in Deledda is without dialectal elements (1974: 134). Therefore, it can be argued that the Sardinian lexemes, sentences, idioms, syntactic and morphological constructions are part of

the writer's deliberate stylistic choice. In fact, the rise of the regional novel and of *Verismo* in Italy, which produced respectively a greater interest in the *discovery of the region*, and the preference for an objective description of reality and the use of local languages or dialects, influenced Deledda's linguistic and stylistic choices in favour of the reproduction of the local Sardinian language and customs in her literary works.

### III.9 Conclusion

The analysis of Deledda's *Elias Portolu* and *Canne al vento* has demonstrated the centrality of the regional theme, setting, characters' typology, and language for the Sardinian writer. Although it can be maintained that the lives and tragedies of Deledda's Sardinian characters may in certain cases be transposed to other external realities, and can therefore also be seen as universal, their actions are nevertheless very much dependent on and emphasised by the social and cultural context of the island, on its traditions, conservative views, and strong family and community ties.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, Deledda's *Elias Portolu* and *Canne al vento* can be considered regional novels for their focus on the local realities in social, geographical, cultural, and linguistic terms.

Deledda's main goal, we must remember, was the *promotion* of Sardinia outside the island,<sup>104</sup> and she could do so only by foregrounding its landscapes, its culture, religiosity, beliefs and linguistic habits. However, in her novels, as Verga did with Sicily, Deledda also represented the *problems* experienced by the Sardinian people, and the *negative aspects* of the local society, but unfortunately



she did not suggest a solution to them, or any advice for the general improvement of the Sardinian condition. The emphasis she put on the local problems has often been criticised by her fellow islanders, and has been seen as Deledda's ultimate 'betrayal of Sardinia'. Nevertheless, despite this lack of commitment of both writers in favour of the improvement of the social, economic, and political conditions of their native islands, in my opinion, Verga and Deledda definitely contributed to the promotion of Sicily and Sardinia. They did so not only by divulging information on their respective customs and traditions, but also by realistically emphasising the everyday life of their habitants, and the precarious economic, social, and cultural conditions of their regions. Deledda, in particular, as Fuller argues (2000: 71), represented the effects of those social, political, and economic events on the familial and communal structures.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Letter written by Deledda to A. Scano and G. A. Satta, directors of the periodical *Vita Sarda*, dated 2 May 1893, and quoted by Cirese 1976: 39 in part, and 137-138 in full. "Please support this little worker, who has dedicated her life and thoughts to Sardinia, and who constantly dreams to see it, if not better known, at least liberated from the misrepresentation from overseas" (translation mine).

<sup>2</sup> Among the French writers, she especially admired Balzac's works. In fact, she translated his work *Eugénie Grandet* in 1930.

<sup>3</sup> *La Madre* was translated by Mary Steegman in 1922 with the title *The Woman and the Priest*, published for the American public in 1928 with the title *The Mother*, and reedited in 1974.

<sup>4</sup> According to Sapegno 1971: XV, Deledda had also read Hardy's works, probably during the first two decades of the twentieth century. For Contarino 1992: 413, who quotes Cecchi ("Introduzione a G. Deledda", in *Romanzi e novelle*, Milan: Mondadori, 1941), Hardy was known to Deledda at the time of *Colombi e sparvieri* and *Canne al vento*.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of love relationships between cousins in selected works by Deledda and Hardy cf. Annalisa Lilliu, "The Ambivalence of Cousinship in Grazia Deledda and Thomas Hardy", as part of a forthcoming publication on Grazia Deledda by Troubador (November 2007), edited by Sharon Wood, and entitled *From the Ashes: Essays on Grazia Deledda*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. De Giovanni 1993: 131-132, who quotes Pietro Pancrazi, *Donne e buoi dei paesi tuoi* (Vallecchi: Firenze, 1932).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pilia in Deledda 1972: xxiii.

<sup>8</sup> Capuana's fairy-tales did not have an explicit didactic purpose, which became more prominent in his *racconti per ragazzi*: he was more interested in the *form* of the fairy-tale, in the "capricious creation", and the "wonderful, fantastic plot" ("creazione capricciosa" and "intreccio meraviglioso"), and the influence of Sicilian popular tradition has not been as decisive as suspected (also by Verga). Cf. Vitta in the Introduction to Capuana's *Tutte le Fiabe* 1983: especially 8, 12 and 13.

<sup>9</sup> Cerina 1974: 283, emphasises the central role of 'the character' in *Elias Portolu*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Deledda's letter to her colleague and friend Luigi Falchi, reproduced in Falchi 1937: 126.

<sup>11</sup> Also cf. Lombardi 1979: 89-90.

<sup>12</sup> According to De Giovanni 1993: 85-86, Deledda tried to use a more impersonal narrator in *Canne al vento*, closer to the type prescribed by *Verismo*. However, as she rightly points out, Deledda's narrator failed to achieve a total impersonality, because his/her presence is felt especially in the informative function of the narrative voice which surfaces through Efix's point of view, and also typographically through the use of italics for terms that refer to Sardinian culture and folklore. There is no omniscient and extra-diegetic narrator in this novel, but he/she seems nevertheless to know the characters' feelings and thoughts, especially Efix's, who is also the internal point of view through which the narrator can express his/her view of the world. On the role of the narrator in this novel, also cf. *ibid.* 45-46 and 72.

<sup>13</sup> Letter addressed to the French consul, L. De Laigue, Rome 17 January 1905 (in Dolfi 1979: 8 and note 25, 27). "Sin does not exist, only the sinner does, and he deserves pity, because he was born with his own destiny" (translation mine).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Pirodda 1992: 44-45 and Pirodda in Asor Rosa 1989a: 957.

<sup>15</sup> Also cf. Fuller's comments on 66.

<sup>16</sup> The agro-pastoral social and cultural background appears for example in the sheep shearing episode (*EP*, Chapter IV, 92-93, translation 76-77).

<sup>17</sup> Except perhaps the one to a monsignor who was imprisoned probably for wanting the pope as king. We might wonder whether this can be a reference to Pius IX and to the revolutionary events of 1848-1849 during the Second Roman Republic, also hinted at in Verga's *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. Unfortunately, Deledda does not provide any further information. Cf. *EP*, Chapter I, 34-35, translation 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. De Giovanni 1993: 96-101. However, according to the critic, with the flashback sequences, the temporal setting of the novel goes back approximately to the previous 20 years, thus between

1892 and 1913. Also cf. De Giovanni 2001: 92 on the time of narration. References to the War in Libya in *CV* can be found in Chapter V, 69-71, translation 59-61, and to the Canal of Panama (though not directly mentioned), *ibid.*, Chapter XVI, 202, translation 177-178.

<sup>19</sup> An example can be found at the very beginning of Chapter VI, 76, translation 65.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Sotgiu 1986: 419-423 on the congress, 422 on malaria.

<sup>21</sup> According to De Giovanni 1993: 94, Deledda in *Canne al vento*, but also in other works, describes the *continente*, mainland Italy, as the unreachable place, and the Italian locations mentioned in her works are more generic, less precisely identifiable.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the very beginning of Chapter VIII, 155 in *EP*, translation 148, in which the purification of Nature is transferred to Elias, thus highlighting their symbiosis.

<sup>23</sup> Especially in *Canne al vento*.

<sup>24</sup> Bárberi Squarotti discusses the generic and vague background in which the landscape is determined according to the characters' feelings in *Canne al vento*. Lavinio affirms that the landscape descriptions are filtered by the characters' point of view.

<sup>25</sup> Translation 66-67: "The Portolus' *tanca* had been cleared of trees years ago, and now lay open, vast, beaten by the sun. Here and there rose an occasional cork tree in the green grass, the scrub, the blackberry bushes; in the damp expanse the vegetation was tender and delicate, perfumed by mint and thyme [...]. The *tanca*, even if level and woodless, had secret recesses, rocks and scrub brush; water flowed in certain places through elder woods where the sun barely penetrated, forming mysterious little green lakes, surrounded and divided by rocks breaking the course of the murmuring water."

<sup>26</sup> For example, in *EP* 57, Chapter II, translation 33.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *EP* 128, Chapter VI, translation 117. However, according to Cerina 1974: 287, regionalism and reality are not discussed sociologically in Deledda.

<sup>28</sup> Translation 29: "And then, suddenly, the sublime landscape profaned and desolated by the black gaping mouths dug out by the miners."

<sup>29</sup> Translation 11-12: "Suddenly the valley lies before him, and at the crest of the hill (the hill itself like an enormous heap of ruins) appears the Castle ruins [...]. And over there the sun-striped, shadow-plowed green and white cone of Mount Galte; ahead the town like ruins of an ancient Roman city: deteriorating low stone walls, roofless stone houses, remnants of courtyards and stone barricades. Inhabited hovels, even more melancholy than the ruins, flank the sloping roads that are paved with massive sandstone in the center [...]. The roads were deserted and boulders on the peak of Monte now looked like marble towers."

<sup>30</sup> Translation 155: "The fog thinned. The black woods appeared profiled against the pale blue horizon. Then everything became serene, as if invisible hands had drawn back the veil of bad weather, and a large rainbow with seven vivid colors and another smaller, paler one curved over the countryside. The Nuorese spring smiled on poor Efix sitting by the door of the little church. Large yellow buttercups, damp as though with dew, shone in the silvery meadows, and the first stars appearing at sunset smiled down at the flowers. Sky and land seemed like two mirrors reflecting each other."

<sup>31</sup> Translation 9: "'We are men, we are, we aren't puppets made of fresh cheese like the continentals, even if they are the gaolers of men...'"

<sup>32</sup> Translation 36: "I went to Nuoro many years ago by horseback. The road is pretty, and the town is pretty, yes; the air is good, the people are good. They don't have the fever like we do here, and everyone can work and make money. All the foreigners have become rich over there, while this place seems dead...".

<sup>33</sup> Included in Deledda 1995: 65-169 under the title of *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro in Sardegna*.

<sup>34</sup> Massaiu 1977: 333 rightly sees the amalgamation of Deledda's folkloristic researches in her mature production: these customs are part of the history of Sardinian people.

<sup>35</sup> See Toschi 1967: illustration 52.

<sup>36</sup> Translation 26: "The church of St Francis is in the mountains of Lula. Legend says it was built by a bandit who, tired of his wandering life, promised to give himself up to the law and have the church built if he were acquitted. In any case, true or not, the priors (that is, those who are in charge of the feast) come every year, chosen by the descendants of the founder or founders of the

church. All these descendants (who also say they are relatives of St. Francis) form a kind of community at the time of the festival and novena, and enjoy certain privileges. The Portolus were among them." On the feast of St. Francis cf. Deledda 1995: 193-194, *ibid.* 192 on "*sas cumbissias*").

<sup>37</sup> On the function and the representation of Sardinian religious feasts in Deledda, especially that of St Francis of Lula, see Gruppo di studio universitari nuoresi 1974: 204-205; Cerina 1974: 294. On Sardinian feasts and folklore, cf. Schweizer 1988: 185-210. Also on Sardinian religious festivals cf. Deledda 1995: 188-194.

<sup>38</sup> Translation 39: "A great mastic-wood fire, just like Noemi had seen as a girl, burned in the courtyard of Our Lady of Rimedio, illuminating the dark walls of the Sanctuary and the surrounding cabins. A boy was playing the accordion, but those who had just come from the novena and were preparing supper or already eating inside the cabins were not ready to begin dancing yet [...]. The two Pintor sisters had at their disposal two of the oldest cabins (every year new ones were built), appropriately called *sas muristenes de sas damas*, because they had almost become their private property after the gifts and donations their ancestors had made to the church from the time the archbishops of Pisa got off at the closest port on their pastoral visits to the Sardinian diocese and celebrated mass in the sanctuary." This religious festival takes place near Galtellì: cf. De Giovanni 1993: 53.

<sup>39</sup> They include: *Festa dello Spirito Santo*, "The Feast of the Holy Spirit", *Festa dei Santi Martiri* "The Feast of the Holy Martyrs" in Fonni, *Festa del Redentore* "The Feast of the Redeemer" in Nuoro, the Feast in Monte Gonare, *Festa di San Cosma e Damiano* "The Feast of St. Cosma and Damien" in Mamojada, *Festa della Madonna del Miracolo* "The Feast of the Madonna of the Miracle" in Bitti.

<sup>40</sup> As in *CV*, Chapter XV, 183, translation 161.

<sup>41</sup> Cerina 1974: 294-296, defines the functions of the religious feast in terms of the expansive nature of the community, which enjoys more freedom. She also notes an excessive role of the religious feast in *Elias Portolu*, and a different perspective in the one in *Canne al vento* (Noemi's perspective, and also that of Giacinto and Grixenda – with past and present perspectives).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *EP* Chapter IX, 173, not translated by King. The visit of condolence is also described in Deledda 1995: 182. Gruppo di studio universitari nuoresi 1974: 205-206 also believe that the community's participation in the individual's vicissitudes is a conventional formulaic behaviour, related to the observation and maintenance of the local traditions, more than a truly felt participation to the individual's joy or grief.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *CV*, Chapter IX, 131, translation 113.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *CV*, Chapter XVII, 224, translation 197. On the wedding procession, cf. Deledda 1995: 174. However, according to Deledda *ibid.*, the bride should be accompanied by two of the groom's female relatives, while in *Canne al vento* there is only one and she is a relative of the Pintors' ladies (*CV ibid.*). On Sardinian engagement and wedding traditions, cf. Deledda 1995: 170-176.

<sup>45</sup> Translation 180: "'Yes,' he then said, 'we're just like reeds in the wind, Donna Ester. That's why! We are reeds, and fate is the wind.' 'Yes, all right. But why this fate?' 'Why the wind? Only God knows why.' 'Then may His will be done,' she said, resting her head on her chest."

<sup>46</sup> Cf. for instance *EP*, Chapter V, 111, translation 97-98.

<sup>47</sup> For example, Elias' brother, Mattia, believes in spirits. On superstitious beliefs in Sardinia, cf. Deledda 1995: 136.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *CV*, Chapter I, 5-6, and translation 2-3. On *ianas*, Sardinian fairies, cf. Deledda 1995: 75.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *CV*, Chapter XII, 141-142, translation 123-124.

<sup>50</sup> Angioni 1989: 203. This trend seems to be common among southern European societies, as Goody 2000: 79 demonstrates in his essay, when he refers to Italian and French societies: "Female honour was closely connected with their sexuality, which had to be protected by men."

<sup>51</sup> On illicit relationships and endogamy in Deledda, cf. Greco, for whom love between brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law is recurrent but one of the least 'disgusting' 1984: 125.

<sup>52</sup> Translation 6: "The one who laughed the most was the one who had returned home, but his laugh was weary and broken, his voice weak; his face and hands stood out among all those bronze faces and hands; he seemed like a woman dressed like a man. Besides, his speech had acquired



something different, exotic; he spoke with a certain affectation, half Italian and half dialect, with curses wholly continental.”

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *EP*, Chapter I, 31, translation 4.

<sup>54</sup> *EP*, Chapter IV, 101, translation 86.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *EP*, Chapter IX, 164, translation 159.

<sup>56</sup> Translation 29: “he wanted to shout too, he felt a shudder through his loins, an instinctive memory of races long ago, a need to hurl himself again into a quick gallop, into a free and intoxicating race; but Zia Annedda’s thin little arm held him around his waist, and he not only restrained his primitive instinct, but remained far enough behind the rest of the riders so that the dust they raised would not bother the little old woman.”

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *EP*, Chapter X, 192, translation 191. According to Kozma 2002: 81, there is actually something unusual in Elias, who finds peace in the death of his son.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *EP*, Chapter XIII, 163-164, translation 158.

<sup>59</sup> Translation 159: “Two years went by. People stopped murmuring, laughing, wondering at seeing Elias Portolu, the ex-shepherd, dressed like a seminarist.”

<sup>60</sup> Translation 174: “‘It’s too late, I tell you. The scandal would be terrible; they would say I was crazy.’”

<sup>61</sup> Translation 8: “‘If the little town can’t provide work even for those who were born here?’”

<sup>62</sup> Translation 5: “The town’s most important people entered their conversation. First came the Rector, then the Rector’s sister, then Milese who had married a daughter of the Rector and had gone from hawking oranges and amphoras to being the richest merchant in the village. The mayor, Don Predu, came next, the Pintor sisters’ cousin. Don Predu was also rich, but not like Milese. Then came Kallina the usurer, she also rich, but in a mysterious way.”

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *CV*, Chapter II, 21, translation 16.

<sup>64</sup> Translation 30: “Noemi remembered never taking part directly in the feast, while her older sisters laughed and enjoyed themselves, and Lia crouched like a hare in a grassy corner of the courtyard, perhaps thinking of escape even then [...]. No, she [Noemi] didn’t dance, she didn’t laugh, but it was enough for her to see people enjoying themselves, because she too hoped to take part in the festival of life. But the years passed and the festival of life took place far from the little town, and in order to be a part of it her sister Lia ran away from home.... She, Noemi, remained on the crumbling balcony of the old house just as she had once stood on the priest’s belvedere.”

<sup>65</sup> Translation 34-35: “As soon as he saw Noemi he took off his cap that left its imprint on his thick golden hair, and smiled at her revealing nice teeth in full lips [...]. He seemed to recognize the place where he was. There was the door his mother had talked about so many times.”

<sup>66</sup> Translation 42: “His every word and strange accent struck Grixenda deeply. She hadn’t clearly seen the face of the young man coming from far away places, but she had noticed his height and his thick golden hair like fire.”

<sup>67</sup> Lia’s escape and the consequences of her act for her sisters are described in *CV*, Chapter I, 10-11, translation 7-8.

<sup>68</sup> Translation 14: “He still seemed to see Donna Lia on the balcony, pale and thin as a reed, her eyes fixed on the distance, she too wanting to see what was going on in the world.”

<sup>69</sup> On Noemi’s neurosis cf. De Giovanni 1993: 74-76, and on her relationship with Giacinto 109-113.

<sup>70</sup> For example, cf. the very beginning of the novel, *CV*, Chapter I, 3, and translation 1.

<sup>71</sup> Translation 186-187: “At dawn he moved. This time he really would go and he put everything in order [...]. He took up his *bisaccia*, picked a jasmine from the bush and looked around. The whole valley looked white and sweet as the jasmine. All was silence [...]. Only the reeds stirred above on the ridge, straight and rigid as swords sharpening themselves on the metal of the sky. ‘Good-by, Efix, good-by.’”

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *CV*, Chapter II, 15, translation 11.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Cirese 1976: 38-40.

<sup>74</sup> Secci 1968: 125 calls *sardismi* those words written in Italian that have two different meanings in Sardinian and Italian, and those constructions whose structure derives from Sardinian idioms and fixed expressions.



<sup>75</sup> On the usage of free indirect speech, cf. Bárberi Squarotti 1974: 153. Also cf. Lavinio 1992: 77 who identifies the usage of free indirect discourse in the case of the characters' thoughts.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Herczeg 1978:19-55. His study of Grazia Deledda's sentence structure is fundamental.

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of colour symbolism in Deledda, and especially in *Elias Portolu*, cf. Martinelli 1992: 69-74, and Sole 1992b: 151-180.

<sup>78</sup> Translation 2: "a cuckoo's rhythmical cry, the early crickets' chirping, a bird calling; the reeds sighing and the ever more distinct voice of the river; but most of all a breathing, a mysterious panting that seemed to come from the earth itself. Yes, man's working day was done, but the fantastic life of elves, fairies, wandering spirits was beginning."

<sup>79</sup> Translation 108-109: "[Mattia] He believed in dead and wandering spirits, and during the long nights in the *tanca* watching the sheep he had more than once grown pale seeming to see mysterious flashes in the air, strange animals running by without making a sound, and in that immense solitude of brush and rocks he often heard a faraway voice in the woods, mysterious laments, sighs, whispering."

<sup>80</sup> On Deledda's language, cf. De Felice 1992: 143-150, especially on *Elias Portolu* and also on Deledda's employment of literary, aulic lexemes (145-146) not in full harmony with the characters' spoken language; Herczeg 1978: 19-55; Lavinio 1992: 69-82; Mortara Garavelli 1992: 115-132; Muoni 1992: 269-282 and Pittau 1974: 155-173.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Pittau 1974: 158-159. On Sardinian as a language and not a dialect also cf. Wagner 1951: 58-59.

<sup>82</sup> Wagner 1951: 400 and 403, and Chapter III for the history of the Sardinian language. Some linguists and philologists, however, consider *Nuorese* as a variety of *Logudorese*. For example, Blasco Ferrer divides the *Logudorese* into *Nuorese-Bittese*, *Logudorese comune* and *Logudorese settentrionale*: cf. 199 and map 349. Wagner also divides *Logudorese* into *Logudorese centrale* or *di Bitti*, *Logudorese comune* and *Logudorese settentrionale* (397-398). Sardinian is usually considered as made up of the *Logudorese* and *Campidanese* dialects, while the *Gallurese* and *Sassarese* ones are seen as more marginal and closer to Italian.

<sup>83</sup> Literally, 'uncle', 'aunt': a common appellative of respect for older people, in King's translation of *Elias Portolu*, Glossary. To be even more precise, *zio* "uncle" or *zia* "aunt" are two polite forms of addressing elderly people in Sardinia, and as we saw in the previous chapter, in Sicily, whose usage is now mostly restricted to village communities.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. respectively *EP*, Chapter IV, 84, translation 87, and *EP*, Chapter III, 71, translation 50.

<sup>85</sup> Translation 31: "And the Portolus [...] took their place in the *cumbissia maggiore*. This *cumbissia* is a very long, dark room, roughly paved, with an under-roof of cane. At intervals are *focolare* of stone in the floor, and large pegs on the rough walls. Each of these pegs indicates the hereditary spot for one of the families descended from the founders."

<sup>86</sup> Translation 34: "I'll give you nothing".

<sup>87</sup> Translation 12: "Arrita Scada, have you heard?"

<sup>88</sup> Translation 81: "We are men, Elias".

<sup>89</sup> Translation 4: "we are honourable people!"

<sup>90</sup> Translation 44: "'You have to adapt,' Efix said, pouring him something to drink."

<sup>91</sup> Translation 137: "'Zia Pottol! You have to have patience. We were born to suffer.'"

<sup>92</sup> Translation 159: "How did you make the tumor?"

<sup>93</sup> Translation 12: "We're a family, a house of men, we are."

<sup>94</sup> For example, the frequent repetition of the second person singular pronoun *tu* in *Marianna Sirca*.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. the imprecation "*Corfu 'e mazza a conca*", which is frequently employed in *CV* (for example, Chapter VIII, 105, translation 92, "blast her").

<sup>96</sup> Italics mine. Translations 9: "We are men, we are, we aren't *puppets made of fresh cheese* like the continentals", "*Men made of fresh cheese*" (*ibid.*).

<sup>97</sup> Translated as "Every little bush has ears!" (79).

<sup>98</sup> "Proverbio sardo: *cada mettichedda juchet orichedda*." (*EP*, Chapter IV, 95), translation 193, endnote 10: "'Every little bush has ears' – a Sardinian proverb."

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *EP*, Chapter I, 43, translation 17.

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<sup>100</sup> Translation 4: “‘A hundred years before another misfortune, a hundred years before another...’ Zia Annedda murmured through her tears.”

<sup>101</sup> De Giovanni 1993: 47.

<sup>102</sup> Confirmed by Mortara Garavelli 1992: 122.

<sup>103</sup> Sotgiu 1986: 286-287 argues that Deledda’s dramatic Sardinian landscapes emphasise the tragedy of her characters’ vicissitudes.

<sup>104</sup> On Deledda’s contribution to the promotion of a wider knowledge of Sardinia, also cf. Cirese 1976: 43-46, and Alziator 1954: 499 and 515-519.

## Chapter IV: Thomas Hardy's regional novels

It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature – neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. ('Egdon Heath' in *RN*, Book I, Chapter I, 11)

### *IV.1 Thomas Hardy's life and literary career*

Thomas Hardy was born in Higher Bockhampton, in the parish of Stinford, Dorset,<sup>1</sup> in 1840. Born in an age when English conservative rural life was undergoing severe changes brought about by population expansion, urbanisation, the introduction of railways and enclosures, the mechanisation of agriculture and new migration opportunities, Hardy nevertheless managed to experience some of those peaceful realities which were going to be disrupted in the following decades.<sup>2</sup> From a young age, Hardy was involved in music and like Deledda, in folklore, tales and the oral tradition which characterised his native region, and which would play a fundamental role in his literary production. In fact, as Millgate (2004: 7) explains: "His novels, stories, and poems are heavily dependent for their settings, their details, and often their plots upon things heard and seen in his childhood". In particular, the "vivid tale-telling of his parents" (Millgate 2004: 8) and relatives proved to be a fundamental source of inspiration.

Hardy became an apprentice under John Hicks, a Dorchester architect, while studying Latin and Greek. He moved to London in 1862 and found employment as architect's assistant. During this period, Hardy's literary interests broadened and his desire to become a poet increased. Hardy decided to leave London for

health reasons, and returned to Dorset as Hicks' architectural assistant. This gave Hardy more time to dedicate to writing verse, and eventually prose. After his first unpublished novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, he wrote *Desperate Remedies*, a novel of sensation, which was published anonymously in 1871. Inspired by his childhood, the novel *Under the Greenwood Tree* followed in 1872. Defined by some as a pastoral novel or a village love-story,<sup>3</sup> this novel contains those elements that will later characterise his major works, in particular, a localised setting and rural characters. Afterwards, all of Hardy's novels were published firstly as serials and only later in volumes. The book edition of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* appeared in 1873, while *Far from the Madding Crowd*, defined by Hardy as "a pastoral tale" and by the *Spectator*'s critic Hutton as "a regional novel grounded in intimate knowledge of a functioning community",<sup>4</sup> was published in 1874. As Millgate (1982: 162) and (2004: 149) points out, it is in this novel that the author introduces the term *Wessex* to describe his fictional region, and also possibly chooses to focus his work on regional themes.<sup>5</sup>

After a change from countryside themes with *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), Hardy, however, went back to them with *The Return of the Native*, published in 1878, which was originally planned as a "story dealing with remote country life, somewhat of the nature of 'Far from the Madding Crowd'".<sup>6</sup> The historical novel *The Trumpet-Major* followed in 1880, and later the less famous ones *A Laodicean* (1881) and *Two on a Tower* (1882). Hardy's reborn interest in regional material inspired his research for his following novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), in which the closely-related community of the market town

Casterbridge – that is, Dorchester – is not only described and analysed in its economic and social aspects, but also becomes the centre of Hardy's concept of Wessex, as Millgate points out (1982: 249).<sup>7</sup>

In 1887 he published *The Woodlanders*, his own favourite novel, also based on familial reminiscences, which became Hardy's biggest success after *Far from the Madding Crowd*, as mentioned by Millgate (1982: 284). In 1891 the controversial *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* followed the publication of the collections of short stories *Wessex Tales* (1888) and *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891). In 1894 he published another collection of short stories, *Life's Little Ironies*, which was followed by *Jude the Obscure* in 1895, together with the collected edition of his works by Osgood, McIlvaine of 1895-1896 (the Wessex Novels). It is with this edition, and especially with the Preface of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, that the role of Wessex becomes fundamental to the establishment of Hardy as a regional novelist. Hardy wanted to see the idea of Wessex as the main connection among his works, and while it constantly developed in novels such as *The Return of the Native*, it found its unifying point in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and in Dorchester as the centre of Wessex. By 1912, Wessex had become for Hardy a partly real, and partly dream country, in which a combination of realism and invention was successfully realised.

His last novel to be published was *The Well-Beloved*, in 1897 (serialised in 1882). Possibly hurt by the severe criticism received by works such as *Tess* and *Jude*,<sup>8</sup> Hardy turned to his favourite genre, poetry, in the later stage of his literary career with the *Wessex Poems* (1898), *Poems of the Past and Present* (1902),



*Time's Laughingstocks* (1909), *Satires of Circumstances* (1914), *Moments of Vision* (1917), *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), *Human Shows* (1925), *Winter Words* (1928), and *The Collected Poems* (1930). He also published another collection of short stories, *A Changed Man and Other Tales* in 1913, and the dramas *The Dynasts*, in three volumes (1904-1908) and *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall* (1923).

His first wife Emma Lavinia Gifford died in 1912, and he married Florence Emily Dugdale in 1914. Emma's sudden death, however, had caused a profound sense of guilt and regret in the writer, and inspired some of his best poems (known as 'Poems of 1912-13'). In late life, Hardy's exceptional role in the literary world was eventually recognised with numerous honorific prizes. He continued to revise his works, and the allusions to sexuality, pregnancy, miscarriages and suicide became more explicit, while the number of dialectal features increased in the 1895-1896 collected edition of his novels diminished in the 1912 one.<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hardy died in 1928.

#### IV.2 *The various editions and the plots of The Return of the Native and of The Mayor of Casterbridge*

In this chapter, I analyse a small selection of Hardy's 'novels of character and environment', namely *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.<sup>10</sup>

*The Return of the Native* provides an excellent representation of the contrastive relationship between the characters and their native place or community, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* offers a perfect example of a community in which country

and town peacefully subsist together. This, in my opinion, and as already mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, is something uncommon in regional fiction, which is usually based on the contrast between country and town life. I will also attempt to prove that, despite the various influences of and interference from other sub-genres and modes found by many critics in Hardy's novels, their regional theme is the predominant one.

Hardy firstly published *The Return of the Native* in serial form in Volume 37 of the magazine *Belgravia* in twelve monthly episodes from January to December 1878.<sup>11</sup> It was later published in the three-volume edition of 1878 by Smith, Elder & Co. (this edition is also used in this chapter), in a revised edition in 1880, and in the first collected edition of the Wessex Novels published in 1895 by Osgood, McIlvaine & Co. (Volume VI). This edition, according to Slade, provides several important changes, especially as regards the characters of Eustacia and Wildeve, while the final one of 1912, included in the major collected edition of novels and verse, published between 1912-13 in twenty-four volumes, and known as The Wessex Edition, provides "minor shifts of emphasis and language" and some interesting revisions.<sup>12</sup>

*The Return of the Native* is the story of Clym Yeobright, who returns from Paris to his native Egdon Heath, "that vast expanse of moorland which stretches, practically without a break, from Dorchester to Bournemouth",<sup>13</sup> to become a teacher. His cousin Thomasin marries, after some complications, Damon Wildeve, who previously had an affair with Eustacia Vye, a beautiful young woman who dreams of leaving Egdon Heath with a promising man. Clym marries Eustacia

despite his mother's disapproval, but his health deteriorates and he cannot pursue his studies further. Eustacia, partly involuntarily, causes further friction between her and Clym and Clym's mother, who suddenly dies after an unsuccessful visit to their house. Eustacia and Clym separate, and shortly before leaving the Heath, she dies together with Wildeve. Clym, destroyed by his mother's and wife's deaths, contemplates the idea of marrying his cousin Thomasin, but she eventually marries Diggory Venn, an ex-reddleman<sup>14</sup> who has always loved and supported her, while Clym becomes an itinerant preacher.

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* firstly appeared in serial form in the magazines *Graphic* and *Harper's Weekly* (for the American serial edition) between January and May 1886.<sup>15</sup> It was later published in England in the two-volume edition of 1886 by Smith, Elder & Co. (this edition is the one used in this chapter), and by Henry Holt (Leisure Hour series) for the American edition in the same year. It appeared in a single-volume and slightly revised edition in 1887 (Sampson Low), and in the first collected edition of the Wessex Novels published in 1895 by Osgood, McIlvaine & Co. (Volume III). Various differences can be found among these versions of the novel, but it is in the 1895 Wessex edition that the longer penultimate chapter of the American first edition appeared in England for the first time, together with linguistic revisions, including greater colloquialism. Minor revisions characterise the 1912-13 Wessex Edition, and almost entirely typographical corrections can be found in the de luxe Mellstock Edition of 1919-20.<sup>16</sup>

Michael Henchard, the central character of the novel, is a hay-trusser who, under the influence of alcohol, sells his wife Susan and their daughter Elizabeth-Jane to a sailor, Mr Newson, during an agricultural fair. After having sobered up, Henchard unsuccessfully attempts to find them, and takes the vow of not drinking alcohol for twenty years (twenty-one in the 1912 edition). He moves to the town of Casterbridge (Dorchester), where he becomes a successful entrepreneur in the corn and wheat trade and is elected mayor. Eighteen years later, Mr Newson is presumed dead and Henchard's wife and her daughter Elizabeth-Jane visit Casterbridge on the same day in which Donald Farfrae, a Scotsman who wants to move to America, arrives in town. Henchard offers Farfrae employment and also meets Susan and Elizabeth-Jane. The couple are reunited, but Mrs Henchard soon dies. Henchard, who has believed that Elizabeth-Jane was his own daughter, is proved wrong by a letter left by his late wife, and his affection for the young woman immediately diminishes. Moreover, because of various unfortunate circumstances and his own temper, Henchard suffers some personal failures: he quarrels with Farfrae, and his step-daughter goes to live with Lucetta Le Sueur, a woman with whom Henchard had had a relationship and who desperately wanted to marry him, but whom Farfrae eventually marries instead. Henchard's reputation is damaged even further,<sup>17</sup> he suffers from bankruptcy, and to pay his debts he has to leave his house, which is bought by Farfrae. He also resumes drinking, but some sort of reconciliation takes place between him and Farfrae, and Henchard becomes a journeyman hay-trusser for the latter. Farfrae is elected mayor, and after a period of happiness for him and Lucetta, the latter dies after witnessing a

'skimmity-ride' – a parade organised to mock a married woman of uncertain morality – in which effigies of her and Henchard acted as protagonists. When Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane grow closer once more, Elizabeth-Jane's real father, Mr Newson, visits Henchard in search of his daughter. Henchard lies to him by saying that she is dead. In fact, he cannot live without her renewed affection for him, and is jealous of Newson and Farfrae who is again Elizabeth-Jane's suitor. After having considered suicide, he leaves Casterbridge. Elizabeth-Jane is re-acquainted with her real father, and her marriage with Farfrae takes place. Together with her husband, she looks for her stepfather, but he is already dead: Abel Whittle, an ex-employee, in fact assisted him in the last moments of his life.

#### *IV.3 Hardy, literary genres, and his relation with the regional novel*

As regards literary genres in Hardy, Merryn Williams (1972: xiv) considers Hardy's work as the culmination of the tradition of the country novel, a fictional sub-genre developed in the early nineteenth century by Jane Austen, and which gradually evolved to include more realistic elements and not just the stereotypical image of hard-working and innocent country people.<sup>18</sup> Hardy is, according to Merryn Williams (1972: 193), the first writer to be able to provide a realistic portrayal of these issues of the English country life in his works. However, as the same critic explains (1972: 194-196), Hardy did not condemn the advent of progress or the development of towns. From personal experience, he understood that, although it was important to preserve the local customs and history of the country – a need probably related to the writer's nostalgia for a world that was



rapidly changing – it was also necessary for it to share in the national progress.<sup>19</sup>

Hardy also recognised the importance of education, and of the development of cities and towns, but also aimed at better economic and social conditions and organisation for the countryside people (Williams 1972: 196-200).

Other critics, however, see Hardy primarily as a regional writer – as I also do. Brinkley (1969: 158), for example, believes that Hardy had two types of regional novels from which he could find inspiration: the ‘picturesque’ novel, for example R. D. Blackmore’s *Lorna Doone* (1869), in which the main emphasis was on the physical setting and unusual past history of the area described in the novel, and the ‘interpretative’ novel, like *Middlemarch* (1871-72) in which the aim was a more comprehensive presentation of the locality, which focused on the relationship between the individual and his/her environment, the social habits of the local people and their similarities with and differences from the inhabitants of other areas. According to Brinkley, Hardy preferred the ‘interpretative’ novel because he was interested especially in the local people. In fact, he used the regional novel, as Brinkley (1969: 158) argues, “to express his own view of human life through detailed consideration of the life of that area.”

Chapman also discusses the relation between Hardy and the regional novel, and claims that the author’s major achievement has been that of elevating this fictional sub-genre to a higher level of recognition and appreciation. Like late nineteenth-century Italian regional fiction, this novel type was developing thanks to better communication systems among different parts of the country, which contributed to a better knowledge of the various regions, and to the creation of

novels about recognisable regions, in which the setting, the characters and the speech (and the atmosphere) were local. Wessex, the region Hardy wrote about, was easily identifiable because of the geographical boundaries that the same writer provided in the maps accompanying his novels, which were set in contemporary (to Hardy) times or very recent ones. Sometimes he also used real place-names, other times fictional ones. Wessex is seen as a region of the mind, in which the author's imagination combined with reality, and his characters are universal (Chapman 1990: 25-26).

Boumelha also comments on the author's experimentation on genre and mode. According to her (1982: 6), tragedy and the realist mode integrate the pastoral genre in Hardy.<sup>20</sup> This is generally confirmed by the majority of Hardy's critics. In particular, many of them have also emphasised Hardy's frequent employment of elements from the Greek tragedies and dramas in his novels. For example, Randall Williams (1924: 9-10) claims that *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and especially *The Return of the Native*, present features of the Sophoclean dramas and a Shakespearean view of the life and philosophy of country people. He also sees the later novel as "a tragedy of temperaments", in which passions cannot be controlled by reason and human wills are dominated by a pitiless Fate. Beach also sees *The Return of the Native* as a (Sophoclean) drama and the five books as the five acts of a play, and Shakespeare's influence on Hardy as important, especially in his attitude towards commonplace action and motives.<sup>21</sup> Millgate (1971: 130) also considers *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as dramas, in which elements of Greek tragedy are

recurrent. He also sees in the former features of Shakespearean tragedy.<sup>22</sup> For Slade (in Hardy 1999: xxii), realism is mixed with romanticism in *The Return of the Native*: the hard life of the agricultural labourers is alternated with Eustacia's romantic imagination and aspirations to eternal love and a glamorous life.

In fact, we may say that *The Return of the Native* combines different modes more than genres (or sub-genres): it is a tragic love story carefully set in the scattered villages that constitute the area known as Egdon Heath, which appears to be isolated from the rest of the Wessex region, but is nevertheless a community, a small, but efficient autonomous society. However, as we shall see, the impact of the locality is so important on the lives of the protagonists that it allows the reader to see the novel especially as a regional one, in which, as it often is the case, the regional elements are obviously culturally-specific, and fundamental for the evolution of the plot. Moreover, some ancient and old-fashioned customs still persist there, but they are intermingled with more modern aspirations, such as the desire to expand one's horizons and improve one's prospects by means of money and moving to a town (if not a foreign city like Paris, as in the case of Eustacia and Wildeve). This is also a theme that can be found in other regional works, like Verga's *I Malavoglia* – 'Ntoni and Alfio leave Aci Trezza in search for better working prospects – and Deledda's *Canne al vento* (*Reeds in the Wind*) – Giacinto firstly goes to Galtè, in Sardinia, where his mother was born, and then leaves in order to find employment.

Millgate (2004: 186-187) also discusses the presence of autobiographical elements in *The Return of the Native*. In particular, he sees Mrs Yeobright as

closely based on Hardy's mother Jemima in her early middle age (2004: 25),<sup>23</sup> and believes that Hardy himself had been damaged, as Clym Yeobright was, "by so extreme and emotional dependence upon his mother" (Millgate 2004: 26).

*The Return of the Native* also offers numerous literary allusions – to the Bible, to drama, Romanticism, and pastoral poetry among others. The references to the Greek Classics are certainly important. According to Slade (in Hardy 1999: xxxi-xxxii), the relation to the Oedipus complex appears in the allusions to the Sophoclean plot included in the 1895 edition of the novel, which comprise Clym's overwhelming affection for his mother, his absent (dead) father, his near-blindness and itinerant preaching. Also for Millgate (1971: 142), Books Second and Sixth are dedicated to Clym as an oedipal figure. In his revised Hardyan biography, Millgate (2004: 189) also points out that the classical references and analogies in *The Return of the Native* are "largely derived from his recent readings and rereadings of Greek tragedy, by which Hardy sought to elevate the novel above the common run of contemporary fiction."

The affinities between the novel and Greek tragedy are certainly important in *The Return of Native*. They are related to Hardy's desire to create a link between the past and the present, something that takes place also at the linguistic and stylistic levels, and possibly also to the influence of classical literature, Greek drama, and Ancient Greece in general on the writer, emphasised by Björk (in Page ed. 1980: 104) among others.<sup>24</sup>

However, in my opinion, these are mainly influences and affinities, not features of the novel, which obviously belongs to the genre of fiction. Therefore,

it could be argued that *The Return of the Native* is a novel written in the tragic mode, but also that it nevertheless contains many elements – the circumscribed setting, the influential relation of the characters with it, and so on – that help to define it as a regional novel.

As the title implies, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is more centred on only one protagonist, Michael Henchard. Critics have distinguished elements of the Greek tragedy in this novel as well as in *The Return of the Native*. Lerner (1975: 64-65) sees Henchard as a tragic hero, more than a stoic one, and compares him to Oedipus, Faustus, Othello and especially Lear for his suffering from pride. Tomalin (2006: 206) also considers Henchard to be similar to Lear in his behaviour, but not to be as great as Shakespeare's hero is. However, as Southerington (1971: 96) says, Henchard's character is not fundamentally influenced by the environment: unlike other characters in Hardy's novels, like those in *The Return of the Native*, Henchard's remains unexplained. Nevertheless, by partly jeopardising Henchard's success, for example with the bad harvest, with the gradual modernisation of the agricultural work, and the emphasis on his past mistakes, it can be argued, in my opinion, that the local environment and society, also with their new, more hostile attitude towards him after the discovery of the episode of wife's selling, still contribute to Henchard's tragic end. Moreover, elements of Stoicism may be found especially in Elizabeth-Jane's character.<sup>25</sup> This is also confirmed by Elizabeth-Jane's concluding view of happiness as "the



occasional episode in a general drama of pain" (*MC*, Chapter XLV, 322), and by the strength of character she constantly maintains throughout her adversities.

After having highlighted the influence of the tragic and realistic modes on *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and their relations to Classic works, it is now important to examine the social background of these two novels, in order to determine their dependence on the regions and environment represented in them.

#### *IV.4 The social background of the two novels*

As Merryn and Raymond Williams explain, the economic relations in agricultural rural society in Britain from the late sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries were generally made up of a class of landowners, who usually belonged to the aristocracy, a class of tenant farmers and a class of landless labourers. There could also be some representatives of the class of smallholders and 'family farmers', and of another class which included the carpenter, the smith, the shoemaker, the huckster, and other workers who were not farm labourers. Their situation was slightly better because they were life-holders, copyholders, or occasionally small freeholders. However, their condition gradually deteriorated because of the development of capitalist agriculture and of a manufacturing urban economy. This independent and intermediate class, to which Hardy's family also belonged, was often forced to emigrate,<sup>26</sup> and as Merryn Williams argues, this class was the focus of Hardy's major novels, as well as mobility within classes,<sup>27</sup> either by

means of education, marriage, or accident. The society Hardy portrays is in fact a developing capitalist society, such as that of Casterbridge (Williams 1972: 115).<sup>28</sup>

More specifically, in the 1840s, around the time in which *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are set (between the 1840s and 1850s and before the 1830s respectively),<sup>29</sup> agriculture was the most important of the industries. However, in the second half of the century its importance decreased dramatically: country people did not want to stay in that sector if their conditions were not improved, and they were attracted by the new opportunities offered by better-paid town labour, improved means of transportation, communication and education. There were also differences in the kind of specialised production and among the rates of income and production in English agriculture. For example, the south-west specialised in dairy farming, but it suffered from the general decrease of arable land in the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, the support for the Anti-Corn Law League came from dairy farmers who expected cheap grain for their cattle and from urban workers who wanted cheap bread. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 by Peel's Conservative government<sup>30</sup> caused dramatic problems to the arable farmers of England. In the next thirty years, however, English agriculture prospered, because production was increased by the modernisation of farming methods (Williams 1972: 1-2, 4-5).

As regards Dorset, it was included among the arable counties in James Caird's map.<sup>31</sup> However, in the nineteenth century, this region was very much associated with dairy production and sheep farming. Especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, the region experienced a lack of skilled labourers, who

moved to the towns or emigrated; this, as Millgate (1971: 217) argues, consequently favoured the introduction of machinery and attracted the employment of specialised labourers from the north.

Moreover, while the agricultural society of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is still characterised by a profitable production in corn before the advent of the drastic changes that followed the repeal of the Corn Laws, and by the first, timid modernisation attempts introduced by Farfrae, in *The Return of the Native* rural society is not very productive and appears conservative and not open to modernisation, with the exception of Clym, who has also worked abroad before returning to Egdon Heath, and has experienced mobility through education. This view is also confirmed by Brinkley (1969: 158), who sees the societies that Hardy describes in his novels as remote and conservative in their isolation and maintenance of traditions, as in *The Return of the Native*, but also gradually open to innovation and modernisation in agriculture, as in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. As Merryn Williams explains, Egdon Heath, for example, does not offer many different professions – not even in farming, because it is too wild for it– except furze-cutting. Moreover, the main characters belong to a higher class than that of the furze-cutters (Clym and Mrs Yeobright, Eustacia, and Wildeve). Diggory is the only character who at the end of the novel still exercises a job related to the land. Casterbridge, instead, is not only an important cattle farming area (*MC*, Chapter XXIX, 203), but is also especially the centre of the corn agricultural production; because of the fluctuation of the harvests, and consequently of the

production, living there may favour social mobility as well, as happens in the case of Henchard and Farfrae.<sup>32</sup>

As regards the disappearance of old professions, in *The Return of the Native* Hardy presents that of the reddleman, Diggory Venn. In fact, at the beginning of Chapter IX, Hardy provides some information about this profession (*RN* 79-80), which seems to have become less widespread than before the introduction of the railway system in Wessex. By the end of the novel, Venn has become a dairy farmer. In Book II, Chapter I of the same novel, some of the agricultural activities of the place, such as the building of stacks from furze-faggots is described (*RN* 107). Moreover, Hardy also brings to the reader's attention the fact that shepherds as central figures have disappeared with the passage of time in Egdon Heath, and that they have been substituted by heath-croppers and furze-cutters.<sup>33</sup>

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Henchard experiences mobility through class: he begins as a hay-trusser, he becomes a merchant, and after his ruin he is a hay-trusser again. Farfrae's evolution is also important: from potential emigrant, he becomes Henchard's manager and also an independent dealer. However, other important changes have also affected the social background of this novel: the agricultural fair of Weydon Priors,<sup>34</sup> during which Henchard had sold his wife and daughter has, after eighteen years, undergone dramatic changes. In fact, when Susan and her daughter Elizabeth-Jane return to the Fair to trace Henchard's steps, Hardy not only mentions the worsened conditions of some of the participants, like the furnity-lady, and of the fair itself, but also presents the evolution and the mechanisation of agricultural working conditions:

Here, too, it was evident that the years had told. Certain mechanical improvements might have been noticed in the roundabouts and highfliers, machines for testing rustic strength and weight, and in the erections devoted to shooting for nuts. But the real business of the fair had considerably dwindled. The new periodical great markets of neighbouring towns were beginning to interfere seriously with the trade carried on here for centuries. The pens for sheep, the tie-ropes for horses, were about half as long as they had been. The stalls of tailors, hosiers, coopers, linen-drapers, and other such trades had almost disappeared, and the vehicles were far less numerous. (MC, Chapter III, 20)

When Henchard leaves Casterbridge at the end of the novel, the area of Weydon Priors where the fair usually took place is mentioned once again: after twenty-two or twenty-three years (twenty-five in the 1912 edition), the fair no longer exists, thus signalling the victory of the rival town markets: “The renowned hill, whereon the annual fair had been held for so many generations, was now bare of human beings, and almost of aught besides” (MC, Chapter XLIV, 312). The modernisation of agriculture is also represented in the novel by Farfrae’s innovations.

However, Millgate (2004: 33) points out that the Dorset countryside of Hardy’s childhood “was in many respects a pleasanter and more prosperous place than most contemporary accounts would suggest.” According to the same scholar, Dorset (or parts of it) had a reputation as a poor, backward, and “somewhat uncouth corner of the kingdom” (Millgate 2004: 36).

Thus, in relation to the social background of Hardy’s novels, we may concur with Millgate’s opinion that Hardy’s main focus is on the representation of this struggle for mobility and improvement at a time when agricultural society was evolving rapidly and dramatically. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, for example, Hardy totally omits references to and portrayals of the gentry and the clergy, who



certainly had an important role in Dorchester. In Millgate's opinion, this occurs because Hardy chose to emphasise the fact that social mobility and advancement were not simply conditioned by birth, but could also be achieved through hard work and financial success, as Henchard's case demonstrates (Millgate 1971: 213-214). In this respect, according to Page (1977: 36), in the major novels the presence of characters of the upper and intellectual classes is restricted to their role of 'outsiders' who hardly integrate with the local community made up of the local labourers, shepherds and peasants, people who work, and whose work is carefully represented by the author. By emphasising the changes in professions and in the agricultural and pastoral life, Hardy also seems to manifest his nostalgic feelings for a rural world that was no longer there, the "old England", as Widdowson (1989: 64) would call it,<sup>35</sup> and which was permanently changing. This view is also shared by Hillis Miller (1970: 113), who sees the "theme of social change and its power to destroy the old rural ways of life" as a constant one in Hardy's fiction. However, as already mentioned, Hardy was not against progress and innovation. In fact, as Millgate points out, Hardy "was rarely tempted to indulge in automatic nostalgia for the past" (2004: 38), because he was aware of the benefits introduced by social change. Moreover, by focusing his analysis on a specific area of the country, Hardy certainly gave a strong regional connotation to these two novels. Finally, Hardy also chose not to express his personal political views in his works: in fact, as both Millgate (2004: 219) and Tomalin (2006: 77) point out, Hardy came from a Liberal family, but chose "not

to take a public stance on politics” (Tomalin 2006: 199). A similar approach was also shared by the other three authors discussed in this thesis.

#### *IV.5 Landscape and setting*

As Brinkley (1969: 165) argues,

The setting of a regional novel is often the most regional element in it. Every locality has its characteristics, and these may be considered from three points of view. A place may affect the lives of those who live there; it may be affected by them; and it has a peculiar ‘character’.

These elements are to be found in Hardy’s major novels. A characteristic that they also have in common is the geographically, socially and temporally localised setting, in which the characters are placed to experience not only their personal vicissitudes, but also the historical changes that contribute to the development of the plot. The geographical setting is usually circumscribed and carefully represented together with the community or the communities of the novels, which, according to Southerington (1971: 6), are tight and innately conservative and often characterised by intermarriages. Within them, the social and professional role of the various characters is fundamental, as also is the particular ‘character’ of the place.

Merryn Williams explains the origins of Hardy’s Wessex in the author’s revival of the region’s ancient name. She cites Lea, according to whom this region was made up of the counties of Berkshire, Wilts, Somerset, Hampshire, Dorset, and Devon, wholly or in part. This was one of the most backward counties in Britain, mostly dedicated to sheep-breeding and dairy production, in which the same backwardness favoured the maintenance of old customs and superstitions.<sup>36</sup>

Millgate (2004: 232) also points out that Hardy combined professional shrewdness with creative vision in the emphasis the writer chose to put on the concept of the region of Wessex; the same scholar discusses the benefits that might flow from the exploitation of regional settings.

Gilmour (1989: 66-68) repeatedly emphasises the influence and pressure of Hardy's audience on the creation and establishment of the concept Wessex, claiming that it "was almost as much a creation of his audience and of the contemporary media as it was of the author himself" (Gilmour 1989: 66).

As Brinkley (1969: 165-167) explains, in *The Return of the Native*, Hardy provides a precise analysis of this 'character', and of the geography, the history and the society of Egdon Heath. The novel begins with the presentation of the setting, the vast and scarcely inhabited Egdon Heath: four pages in which the author emphasises the solitude and the isolation of the heath, its history and mythology (especially the maintenance of Celtic customs), and includes references to other European and classic locations. The heath is solitary, obsolete, left almost unchanged for centuries, and civilisation is an enemy to it.<sup>37</sup> Hardy describes not only the desolation and the wilderness of the heath, but also, for example, its beauty during the summer season (*RN*, Book IV, Chapter I, 235). As we shall see in IV.7, the landscape is often portrayed in harmony with the characters' feelings. This symmetry between the landscape and the protagonists' emotions does not, in my opinion, contradict the general view of Egdon Heath as the representative of a hostile, inimical Nature. In fact, as we shall see, although Hardy's illustrations of the local environment and of its flora and fauna are

generally harmonious with the characters' feelings, they nevertheless show that Nature is an autonomous power that only involuntarily influences human life. It does not, as many critics have claimed, rage against the characters and their lives. It is humanity, and consequently the small local community, which has chosen to live in such an inhospitable environment as Egdon Heath, and who has to adapt – also in Darwinian terms – to it.<sup>38</sup> As a matter of fact, only those who do so are content with their lives in the heath (for example, the furze-cutters) and not those who aim to change it, as Clym initially does. In *The Return of the Native*, the Heath itself plays a determinant function: D.H. Lawrence sees it and its representation of primitiveness and instinctive life as the key elements of this tragedy (Lawrence 1985: 25). Like him, Randall Williams (1924: 12-13) and Beach (1962: 105) highlight the personality and the force of the Heath and Nature in general.

Finally, according to Millgate (2004: 186), the map inserted in the novel

clearly revealed to anyone familiar with the countryside around Dorchester that the place whose unity Hardy sought to project was the tract of heathland immediately adjacent to Higher Bockhampton, the position of the fictional Bloom's End roughly approximating to the location of the Hardy cottage.

However, Millgate (2004: 334) also believes that Hardy did not accept (even though he did not deny) the identification of his fictional towns and villages with real one (for example, Dorchester with Casterbridge):

In maps and texts alike Hardy used the real names of natural features – Stour, Frome, High Stoy, Vale of Blackmore, etc. – to establish the geography of his fictional Wessex and render it recognizable and even accessible, but places of human construction and habitation were given the names – Mellstock, Shaston, Melchester, etc. – that he had himself invented. (*ibid.*)<sup>39</sup>

The initial historical and geographical setting of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is provided at the beginning of the novel, in Chapter I:

One evening of late summer, before the present century had reached its thirtieth year, a young man and woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors on foot. (*MC*, Chapter I, 3)<sup>40</sup>

Thus, although most of the novel is set in the town of Casterbridge, that is, Dorchester, initially the scene is a generic countryside one (*MC*, Chapter I, 4). Later, the couple reaches the agricultural fair, according to Wilson one of the largest agricultural fairs in England,<sup>41</sup> and the wife-sale takes place.

Eighteen years later, when Susan and her daughter reach Casterbridge, the town is carefully described in Chapter IV, and appears old-fashioned to Elizabeth-Jane:

Its squareness was, indeed, the characteristic which most struck the eye in this antiquated borough, the borough of Casterbridge – at that time, recent as it was, untouched by the faintest sprinkle of modernism. It was compact as a box of dominoes. It had no suburbs – in the ordinary sense. Country and town met at a mathematical line. (*MC*, Chapter IV, 27)

The High Street shops are also illustrated (*MC*, Chapter IV, 29), and the tools sold in them highlight the agricultural and also pastoral character of the place.

Hardy offers numerous descriptions of Casterbridge. The town is generally seen as the complement of the rural life around, and not as its urban opposite, as was the case with many other novels of the period, including regional ones. For example, the contrast between the customs of the country and those of the city is represented in *The Return of the Native* (*RN*, Book I, Chapter II, 14-15), and a town like Budmouth is also admired by the inhabitants of Egdon Heath: “As a



rule, the word Budmouth meant fascination on Egdon" (*RN*, Book I, Chapter X, 95). Therefore, it is possible to define Casterbridge not in terms of city or town versus country, but of city, or better town *and* country, something innovative in the fiction of the time: "Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite" (*MC*, Chapter IX, 56). The description continues with the illustration of the High Street houses, seen from Elizabeth-Jane's perspective, which provides a clear image of the relaxed and trusting attitude of the local community, which is usually more common in rural society (*MC*, Chapter IX, 59).<sup>42</sup> Later, Casterbridge market is presented, with the vans of the agricultural masters coming into town from Mellstock, Weatherbury, Hintock, Sherton-Abbas (*ibid.*). Market-days are important, because they also act as the gathering place of the main and minor characters. The market is also the place where Farfrae exhibits his mechanical innovation, the horse-drill, but Casterbridge is still a place tied to past and traditional customs (*MC*, Chapter XXIV, 166). Casterbridge is also described as the pole of the surrounding country life, an agricultural town which differs from the manufacturing towns usually unrelated to the surrounding countryside:

Thus Casterbridge was in most respects but the pole, focus, or nerve-knot of the surrounding country life; differing from the many manufacturing towns which are as foreign bodies set down, like boulders on a plain, in a green world with which they have nothing in common. Casterbridge lived by agriculture at one remove further from the fountain-head than the adjoining villagers – no more. (*MC*, Chapter IX, 60-61)

Finally, the town's Roman origins are also carefully discussed in Chapter X, and presented when Susan meets Henchard at the Roman amphitheatre (*MC* 68). Combined with the country-like and city-like aspects mentioned above, the

Roman elements certainly contributed, in my opinion, to the multifariousness of Casterbridge.

As already mentioned, Casterbridge became, for Hardy, the centre of his fictional Wessex. According to Millgate (1971: 95), the term *Wessex* in Hardy came into being in *Far from the Madding Crowd* for the first time, and it reappeared in *The Hand of Ethelberta*, confirming his interest in it as a fictional region. It also became the focus of the preface to the 1895 edition of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Moreover, already in *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) it is possible to find disguised some place names that will recur in later novels, including Casterbridge. Afterwards, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy developed the idea of Weatherbury, Budmouth and Casterbridge. However, considering that some of the later novels, like *A Laodicean* or *Two on a Tower* did not elaborate the idea of Wessex further, and that we have to wait until *The Mayor of Casterbridge* for a more complete and accurate identification of Wessex and Dorchester as its centre, and even further for the first collected edition of his novels in 1895-97, it is possible to agree with Millgate's view (1971: 235-237) that Hardy's idea of Wessex as the region where his novels should be set developed gradually and consistently with his own return and settlement in Dorchester.

According to Millgate (1971: 244), Hardy also shows his fidelity towards the Wessex world and its topography in the verisimilitude of his descriptions of landscapes, villages and towns. In fact, the same critic (1971: 245) points out that

Hardy based them on the known, on the authentic, and he offered some variations on the real ones.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the localities and customs that Hardy had seen and experienced during his childhood were to be transformed into the fictionalised Wessex that is so often the protagonist of his novels, poems and short stories.<sup>44</sup> It could be argued that, like Sardinia for Deledda, Hardy's Wessex was the dominant 'character' of his literary production, and also for this reason, novels such as *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, in which the setting is central for the dynamics of the novels, can be considered as regional ones.

Moreover, Hardy carried out careful research into the history of his region, especially in the British Museum and on his local newspaper, *The Dorset Country Chronicle*, and then nostalgically transposed what he found – even if it belonged to the previous couple of decades – into his novels, also introducing anecdotes and folklore together with geographical and topographical details. This contributed to the creation of a 'partly real, partly dream' Wessex.<sup>45</sup> Despite his idea of a unified Wessex, Hardy's novels provide more a sense of isolation experienced in towns, villages and communities, separated and closed upon themselves. As Millgate (1971: 347) interestingly points out, Hardy's work as a regionalist was to focus on the microcosms of each individual community – Egdon, for example – instead of on the macrocosm of Wessex, this despite the central role of Casterbridge. This view is also accepted by Chapman, who highlights the double function of Egdon Heath as local and also universal: "The world of Egdon Heath is at once wholly local and yet a stage for human drama not limited by space or time" (1990: 9).

Page (1977: 44-46) also defines the settings of most of Hardy's novels as geographically very limited, in which certain elements are adapted from real life. Enstice highlights Hardy's choice of representing "'enclosed' landscapes", for example in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, in which Dorchester appears to be a self-sufficient, independent town, in which external contacts do not seem fundamental, and which also emerges as timeless and is devoid of the gentry: thus, Hardy manipulates reality for his fictional purposes.<sup>46</sup> This adaptation of reality to fictional designs is also highlighted by various critics, including Widdowson, who sees Hardy's Dorset/Wessex as an example of a typical English landscape for its rural, non-urban connotations, but at the same time created, 'aesthetically made' by Hardy.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, Wing (Page 1980: 84) states that contentment is given in Hardy's novels, as is usually the case in regional fiction, by staying close to the native village and to its traditional way of life: any type of movement is in fact a cause of unhappiness. We have already seen this in Verga's *I Malavoglia*, and it is a theme to be found also in Deledda. In fact, for Wing (Page 1980: 98-101), Hardy is at his best when he achieves a happy balance in the relationship among action, person, and place, which for the critic are the constituents of the regional novel. When the characters move away from their native place, the novels lose their intensity and tone. Moreover, the introduction of strangers within the local communities often brings distress, for example in the case of Fitzpiers (*The Woodlanders*) and Sergeant Troy (*Far from the Madding Crowd*), less so in the case of Diggory Venn, and I would add, Farfrae and the same Henchard, who positively contribute



to the economy of Casterbridge. This is another element that can be found in Deledda: when Giacinto, in *Canne al vento*, arrives to Galtè, he destroys his aunts' and Efix's destitute but peaceful lives. In Verga's *I Malavoglia*, Comare Zuppidda does not appreciate the presence of new, foreign arrivals like Don Silvestro, who has achieved a powerful position in the village, and has become an unwelcome suitor for her daughter.

After having examined Hardy's accurate presentation of the landscape and environment of *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, it is now important to discuss the customs of the region which are represented in these novels.

#### *IV.6 The customs of Wessex*

The representation of regional or local customs is a convention of Hardy's novels. For example, Chapter Three in Book I of *The Return of the Native* is actually dedicated to "The Customs of the Country". In it, Hardy carefully describes one important tradition of the area, that of furze bonfires lit by the local people (especially furze-cutters) on 5<sup>th</sup> November to celebrate Guy Fawkes and the 'Gunpowder Plot'. According to Hardy, this tradition was carried on especially to remember pre-Christian (Nordic) rites,<sup>48</sup> which would give the novel some Celtic connotation.

Around the bonfires, singing, dancing, gossip, and general conversations on superstition take place. In this way, Hardy introduces the reader to the community of Egdon Heath and to the events prior to the beginning of the narration, such as



the supposed marriage between Thomasin Yeobright and Damon Wildeve, which should have taken place on the same day as the bonfire celebration. In relation to this event, wedding congratulations, by means of singing and visiting them at their new home, are also described in detail (*RN*, Book I, Chapter V, 48-53).

When Thomasin gets ready to marry Damon for the second and successful time, Hardy mentions a feature of the bride's preparation that is similar to the hair partition mentioned by Verga in *I Malavoglia* when Mena gets engaged to Brasi Cipolla: the braiding of the bride's hair (*RN*, Book II, Chapter VIII, 158). This demonstrates that sometimes what we consider local customs may actually be diffused in other regions or even countries.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, a superstition related to marriage is the throwing of a slipper to wish the bride good luck, which is performed by Mrs Yeobright:

“[...] Well! God bless you! There, I don't believe in old superstitions, but I'll do it.” She threw a slipper at the retreating figure of the girl, who turned, smiled, and went on again. (*RN*, Book II, Chapter VIII, 158)

In *The Return of the Native*, traditional festivities are often represented. A local tradition related to Christmas is that of the Egdon mummers:

“mummers” are local youths who perform a traditional Christmas folk-drama which, probably having developed out of pagan festivals marking the winter solstice, came to be given a Christian veneer along with items of topical and local relevance.<sup>50</sup>

In the novel, Hardy presents the Christmas party and the mummers' play of St. George (against the Saracen) performed at the Yeobrights' house (*RN*, Book II, Chapters V and VI, 131-138). As in many of Deledda's religious feasts, this performance also offers the two main male and female protagonists – Eustacia and

Clym in this case – the chance to meet each other and to rekindle their mutual interest.

In the same novel, traditional festivals or celebrations are also used as a way to overcome solitude and depression, as when Eustacia decides to go to the village of Egdon Heath's festivity and picnic, known as 'gipsying', during which dancing and light refreshments take place. Once again, as in Deledda's religious festivals, this is also an occasion for young women to look for potential husbands. People from other villages also join the locals in their celebrations, and Eustacia has the chance to meet Wildeve again and to dance with him, thus rekindling their former attachment (*RN*, Book IV, Chapter III, 257).<sup>51</sup> Hardy provides a detailed description of the village festivity, its music, decorations and participants, as if he had been a witness of it (*RN*, Book IV, Chapter III, 253-254), and stresses the pagan aspects of the celebrations, which are certainly comparable to those found in Deledda's festivals:

A whole village-full of emotion, scattered abroad all the year long, met here in a focus for an hour. The forty hearts of those waving couples were beating as they had not done since, twelve months before, they had come together in similar jollity. For the time Paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in all, and they adored none other than themselves. (*RN*, Book IV, Chapter III, 254-255)

Another celebration presented in *The Return of the Native* is that of Maypole-day, which, as Slade explains, was still celebrated in the nineteenth century:

During the nineteenth century some villages still organized dancing (usually on 1 May) around a pole especially set up to serve as the focal point, sometimes as part of the 'club walking' alluded to in note 4 to I.v. (*RN* note 4, 426)<sup>52</sup>

Hardy offers once more a detailed description of the floral decorations, this time from Thomasin's perspective (*RN*, Book VI, Chapter I, 376). Once again, this local festivity, like Deledda's religious festivals, is a cause of celebration, social gatherings and amusement for the local people.

As in Verga and Deledda, superstitious beliefs are still existent and function as a local habit (*RN*, Book V, Chapter II, 314). In *The Return of the Native* they are impersonated in the figures of Susan Nunsuch and Christian Cantle. While Eustacia is fighting against the adversities of the weather, Susan Nunsuch, who has always considered her a witch and the person responsible for her son's illnesses,<sup>53</sup> prepares some black magic against her, in the form of a wax-doll that should represent Eustacia herself. Hardy's omniscient narrator carefully portrays this rite (*RN*, Book V, Chapter VII, 347-349), and emphasises the fact that these superstitions – or black magic procedures – were still common in Egdon at the time of writing: "It was a practice well known on Egdon at that date, and one that is not quite extinct at the present day" (*RN*, Book V, Chapter VII, 347). Remarkably, soon afterwards, Eustacia falls into Shadwater Weir and drowns, together with Wildeve who was trying to rescue her, while Clym narrowly escapes death. The real cause of Eustacia's death – accident or suicide – is actually left to the reader's interpretation.

Finally, Hardy also states that according to provincial customs church-going is also carried out, especially by young women, for 'sentimental reasons'. This might be compared to Sardinian religious feasts described in Deledda's works, in

which religious faith is combined to the more *pagan* acts of socialising and meeting a potential partner. However, because of the scattered location and bad weather, this does not apply to Egdon Heath (*RN*, Book II, Chapter IV, 120-121).

Although the subjects of religion and Christianity are not directly discussed in this novel, as well as in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, according to Paterson (1991: 113), this novel expresses a crucial criticism of Christianity. Eustacia's character functions as the antagonist to the Christian faith and Clym's as the champion of Christianity (Paterson 1991: 113). It is especially the local community, with its celebration of natural life that acts in anti-Christian terms (Paterson 1991: 114). Even though it may be true that, in this novel, the emphasis is put on what we could call 'pre-Christian' ways of life, Christianity is nevertheless present in the church-going rites and Christmas festivities observed by some members of the community, for example Christian Cantle. Perhaps, Hardy's own religious beliefs, which can be broadly defined as those of an agnostic, influenced the scarce direct discussion of religion in this particular novel. However, it is important to remember that the Christian faith was more openly attacked in later works such as *Tess* and *Jude*.<sup>54</sup>

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, examples of local traditions are more circumscribed, such as the Sunday customs of the Casterbridge journeymen at the King of Prussia Inn, which consisted in moderate drinking and high quality discussion of the sermon (*MC*, Chapter XXXIII, 228-229). Others, more

importantly, are related to the agricultural life of the area, like Candlemas Fair, which is:

the main hiring fair of the agricultural year. Although Candlemas was moved to 2 February after England accepted the Gregorian calendar (1752), the fair continued to be held on Old Candlemas Day, 14 February, which is still a chartered fair day in Dorchester. That it is also Valentine's Day has obvious ironic significance.<sup>55</sup>

However, the most significant example of local custom represented in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is that of the skimmy-ride. In fact, after Lucetta's letters have been read by Jopp at the inn (*MC*, Chapter XXXVI, 255) and her previous relationship with Henchard has been disclosed, a skimmy-ride is planned by the lower-class inhabitants of Mixen Lane (*MC*, Chapter XXXVI, 256). As Wilson states in an endnote of the novel:

primarily a rural practice, a skimmington was a procession, usually involving recognizable effigies or actual human impersonators, intended to mock and shame infidelity or spousal abuse. Skimmington was also the name for the effigy, often of a shrewish wife or husband wearing cuckold's horns, probably derived from the image of a wife attaching her husband with a skimming-ladle. Under various names, the custom was widespread, and continued even after it was declared illegal (1882) under the Highway Act.<sup>56</sup>

In the novel, the skimmy-ride takes the form of a procession in which two images – those of Lucetta and Henchard – are set back to back on a donkey, and with the elbows tied to one another, proceed until they reach Lucetta and Donald's house; the performance unintentionally causes Lucetta's death. This practice, organised by the lower-class people who live in Mixen Lane, emphasises the survival of traditions especially among the less-educated people.

Finally, superstition appears in this novel in Henchard: his superstitious beliefs lead him to consult a weather forecaster (*MC*, Chapter XXVI, 184-187),



and when things get worse he believes that 'some extraordinary power' is acting against him (*MC*, Chapter XXVII, 190). We must remember that Mastro-don Gesualdo, in Verga's eponymous novel, also believes in magic and in the protection of saints, as does also Zia Annedda in *Elias Portolu*. This shared belief in superstition might indicate a common 'substratum' of ancient beliefs maintained in isolated and traditional communities like the ones represented in these novels, and in much regional fiction in general.

#### IV.7 Characters

Richard Brinkley has argued that:

A character may be regional either because he has certain peculiarities characteristic of his locality or because he is integrated and associated with that locality. In contrast, a character may be 'unregional' if he is out of sympathy with the area in which he lives. (1969: 159)

Thomas Hardy's novels concur with this definition: not only does he generally provide a physical and psychological portrayal of his characters, but he also emphasises their relation with the local environment or the absence of it. For example, in *The Return of the Native*, the portrait of the main protagonists, Eustacia Vye and Clym Yeobright, and of their relation with the Heath, is particularly important. In fact, the initial emphasis in Eustacia's portrait is on her status as an outsider within the community, on her unusual behaviour and mysterious characteristics. As readers, we first see her as "The Figure against the Sky" in Book I, Chapter VI, while her real portrait can be found in Book I, Chapter VII, "Queen of the Night", in which she is compared to a goddess, a somewhat heavy person, with dark hair and "Pagan eyes, full of nocturnal

mysteries” (*RN* 68). She is a beautiful, mysterious and passionate woman who reminds the reader of Deledda’s female characters of Maddalena (*EP*) and Grixenda (*CV*).

Eustacia hates Egdon Heath: “Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto” (*RN*, Book I, Chapter VII, 69). Egdon Heath, however, is not her native place, but Budmouth, as the narrator explains (*RN*, Book I, Chapter VII, 70); in fact, after the loss of her parents, Eustacia went to live with her grandfather. She has a powerful imagination and dreams of moving to another place or even country with her ideal man. Thus, Eustacia gradually appears to be the outcast, the stranger to the community, because of her peculiar behaviour, and her dislike of the heath, which is shared by Wildeve.<sup>57</sup>

Clym’s portrait is also very elaborate: he is a young, handsome man, but he has singular looks, caused, according to the narrator, by hard thinking, and he is different from the rest of the community members. Like Elias Portolu and ’Ntoni Malavoglia, he is the native who returns home after having experienced life outside his circumscribed community. In fact, it is especially for his being different from the local people that Eustacia immediately falls in love with him (*RN*, Book II, Chapter VI, 141).

According to Millgate (2004: 437), in 1912 Hardy told his second wife Florence Dugdale that he thought the character of Clym as the nicest of all his heroes, and very unlike him. Paterson (1991: 110) values the Promethean theme

and imagery of the novel, and associates Clym with the banished Titan. Millgate, instead, sees Clym as a Christ figure (Millgate 1971: 143).

The theme of love and sexual relationships inside and outside marriage is, according to Page (1977: 38), recurrent and fundamental in Hardy. This is also emphasised by D. H. Lawrence, for whom in the Wessex novels: "the first and chiefest factor is the struggle into love and the struggle with love: by love meaning the love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man" (1985: 20). In fact, as Randall Williams also says, the female characters in Hardy often opt for the wrong partner: they usually have more than one suitor, but even if they choose the right one, their life together is affected by calamities and by an unfriendly destiny. Some have a strong, passionate and neurotic character, which brings catastrophic consequences to them (1924: 70-72 and 87). Eustacia is a perfect example of this.

According to Hillis Miller (1970: xii),

Love is the urgent theme of his fiction and of his poetry. The experience of an 'emotional void' within, a distance of oneself from oneself, drives his characters to seek possession of another person. To possess the beloved would be to replace separation by presence, emptiness by a substantial self.<sup>58</sup>

For the same critic (1970: 114), Hardy's characters spend their lives trying to find a substitute for God in a Godless world. In fact, the effect of love can be compared to that of a religious vision (Hillis Miller 1970: 131). Hillis Miller's discussion of love in Hardy's works is detailed; among the central comments the scholar makes, the fact that Hardy's protagonists are usually encountered when they have already tired of the person to whom they have committed themselves in marriage or love (1970: 115) can be applied to both Eustacia and Henchard, while

the fact that “Hardy’s characters dream of some other place, some other person, some distant source of radiance for their lives” (Hillis Miller 1970: 115) is certainly illustrated in Eustacia’s love for Clym Yeobright.

Despite having been “so interwoven with the heath in his boyhood” (*RN*, Book III, Chapter I, 168), Clym continues to appear different, singular to the other members of the Egdon community, especially for being a promising young man, who would certainly leave his native place to do better things (*RN*, Book III, Chapter I, 168). Clym’s good and caring nature is described in Book II, Chapter II: he is also ahead of his time, and too advanced for rural life (*RN*, Book III, Chapter II, 172).

As a youth, Clym felt that life in Egdon Heath was not for him: “When I first got away from home I thought this place was not worth troubling about. I thought our life here was contemptible” (*RN*, Book III, Chapter I, 170). However, once in Paris, he realised that the kind of life he was leading there did not make him happy:

I found that I was trying to be like people who had hardly anything in common with myself. I was endeavouring to put off one sort of life which was not better than the life I had known before. It was simply different. (*RN*, Book III, Chapter I, 170-171)

Therefore, he decided to go back to Egdon Heath and do something more useful for his native community: opening a night school.<sup>59</sup> Clym’s attitude can thus be compared to that of Elias Portolu, who also returns to Nuoro after having paid for his mistakes, and wants to do something good for himself and his family, and to re-integrate himself with the native community.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, ’Ntoni Malavoglia, when he returns to Aci Trezza after having spent time in prison,

realises that it is too late for him to be reunited with his family and the local community. This theme of 'the return of the native' is common among the works discussed in this thesis, and is also a recurrent one in regional fiction. It generally aims at emphasising the difference between the values of the native community and those of the outside world.

The other community members, however, show little faith in Clym's project, mainly because they know their environment better in terms of its economy and the few employment opportunities it can offer to its inhabitants, and how hard it would be for him to succeed (*RN*, Book III, Chapter I, 171). In spite of their cold but realistic reaction to Clym's project, they are not, as Casagrande argues, "narrow, rigid and unforgiving toward deserters" (1991: 116), but simply pragmatic people who show their solidarity with both Clym and Thomasin in difficult times, and even listen to Clym's preaching at the end of the novel.

Therefore, Clym's relation with his native place is a contrastive one: initially, when he was very young, he saw it with contempt; later, he starts to accept it for what it is and to desire to do good in it, but in a way unsuitable for the local environment. Moreover, his love for and profound knowledge of Egdon Heath is repeatedly shown in the novel:

If anyone knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product [...]. Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym. (*RN*, Book III, Chapter II, 173)

He is a product of the Heath and joins Thomasin in his affinity and love for his native place.<sup>61</sup>



Thus, Clym is the returning native who hopes to improve the conditions of the local society, but is too ahead of his times. As Slade (in Hardy 1999: xxvii-xxviii) argues, Clym seems to dismiss the importance of prosperity and social progress, and he is so centred on himself that he is not able to see, not only metaphorically, but also physically, other people's desires and needs. Despite his humanitarian aspirations, he is forced, with his marriage, to withdraw from his family (his mother) and temporarily from the community: he does not participate in Thomasin and Diggory's wedding party (and in the Maypole festivities), and ends up with the solitary occupation of furze-cutter, and later of itinerant preacher, which slightly re-integrates him with his community. In fact, Millgate (1971: 138-139) considers Clym self-absorbed and too much an idealist to be able to see others and their needs and aspirations, especially those of his wife, and does not show any signs of clemency, a virtue evoked by his name. For Merryn Williams (1972: 143-145), it is impossible for Clym to detach himself from his native community; like Paul Morel, he chooses life, but ends up alone and celibate.

As regards relationships among characters, the one between Clym and his mother is profound but also tormented and probably oedipal, like the one between Paul Morel and his mother in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*.<sup>62</sup> Mrs Yeobright is also similar to Mrs Morel for her aspirations: "though her husband had been a small farmer she herself was a curate's daughter, who had once dreamt of doing better things" (*RN*, Book I, Chapter III, 36). In *Elias Portolu*, on the other hand, Elias' relationship with his mother (Zia Annedda) does not create any serious contrast between the protagonists, but it nevertheless makes Elias renounce his

masculine instincts and strength to protect his mother from any further suffering. These strong relationships between mothers and sons also symbolise the importance of family values in the circumscribed communities represented in the novels, which is also another recurrent theme of regional fiction.

Mrs Yeobright not only disapproves of Clym's decision to leave his Parisian job forever and study to become a teacher, but she also condemns Clym's relationship with Eustacia. The breach between Clym and his mother worsens and is not fixed after Clym and Eustacia's marriage. Another sign of Clym's extreme attachment to his mother is that when she dies, he feels responsible for the event, and is taken ill for a long time (*RN*, Book V, Chapter I, 301-308). Moreover, when he confronts Eustacia after having discovered her tragic but involuntary involvement in his mother's death, Clym shows once more his strong affection for and defence of her memory.

As already mentioned in the section on landscape and setting, an important element of *The Return of the Native*, and more generally of regional fiction, is the union between character and environment: as we have seen, Clym is perfectly familiar with the heath. In the following example from Book III, Chapter VI, Clym, feeling desolate because of the disagreement with his mother, goes in search of a new accommodation. The weather and Nature in general 'participate' in his internal suffering by means of a storm and strong winds, which almost cause 'physical pain' to the trees that seem to suffer as Clym does:

At length Clym reached the margin of a fir and beech plantation that had been enclosed from heathland in the year of his birth. Here the trees, laden heavily with their new and humid leaves, were now suffering more damage than during the highest winds of winter, when the boughs are specially

disencumbered to do battle with the storm. The wet young beeches were undergoing amputations, bruises, crippings, and harsh lacerations, from which the wasting sap would bleed for many a day to come, and which would leave scars visible till the day of their burning. Each stem was wrenched at the root, where it moved like a bone in its socket, and at every onset of the gale convulsive sounds came from the branches, as if pain were felt. (*RN* 206-207)

Clym is also immersed in Nature when he is described as a furze-cutter (*RN*, Book IV, Chapter II, 247). Similarly, Mrs Yeobright's journey to see her son is characterised by unusually hot weather, which is in harmony with the hard, burdensome task of reconciliation (*RN*, Book IV, Chapter V, 269). Finally, on the night in which Eustacia has planned to leave Egdon Heath, Hardy once again employs the landscape and the weather in harmony with the protagonist's (Eustacia's) feelings and internal fears, in this case to suggest an unpromising imminent future (*RN*, Book V, Chapter VII, 345), which will coincide with Eustacia's and Wildeve's deaths. In fact, as Hillis Miller argues,

The immersion of Hardy's people in their environment gives them, especially those who are farmers and woodsmen, a power to read nature as if it were speaking a human language [...]. Nature for such people is thoroughly humanized, not because it is the dwelling place of a personal spiritual presence, but because man has so assimilated himself to nature and dwells so in harmony with it that he can interpret it as though it were speech. (1970: 82-83)

Unlike Clym and Eustacia, who become or stay isolated from the community, Thomasin and her second husband Venn respectively maintain and acquire a respected position within the local society in the course of the novel. The ex-reddleman has in fact become a cattle dealer and is accepted and esteemed within the community of Egdon Heath, whose laws he embraces and does not desire to change or modernise, as Clym does. In effect, as Hillis Miller (1970: 153) also points out, the marriage of Thomasin Yeobright and Diggory Venn at the end of

the novel was lately introduced because of the requirements of serial publication. Hardy, in fact, wanted Thomasin to remain a widow, and Diggory to leave the Heath for good.

Furthermore, Clym is a regional character not for his profession, like the furze-cutters, but, like his mother, for his strong relation with the Heath. Eustacia, instead, is an outsider, who hates the environment in which she is forced to live, and is negatively influenced by it. However, despite her being intrinsically 'unregional' and hostile to the Heath, in my opinion her destiny may be considered 'regional', in the sense that her unhappy life and tragic death are strongly determined by the same environment.<sup>63</sup>

As regards *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, at the beginning of the novel the omniscient narrator provides a physical description of the protagonists, a young couple with a baby, and highlights the distance and the isolation between them. As Page (1977: 78) says, they remind the reader of the Holy Family and their flight to Egypt. The emotional distance between them becomes more evident in the following pages, when Michael Henchard, under the influence of alcohol, decides to sell his wife Susan and their daughter for five guineas. For the wife-sale episode in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, an act not uncommon in those times, Hardy seems to have found inspiration in a contemporary newspaper article.<sup>64</sup> Henchard appears argumentative, quarrelsome, insensitive, stubborn, and disrespectful of his wife, while the latter, with her acceptance of the wife-selling, seems meek, simple and resigned to such an ungrateful husband (*MC*, Chapter I,

8-13). As a matter of fact, Millgate (2004: 224) believes that Hardy's friend Horace Moule and Thomas William Hooper Tolbort, Barnes's most brilliant pupil, and their respective doomed careers may have contributed to Hardy's conception of the rise and fall of Michael Henchard. Millgate (2004: 225) also points out that Hardy was appointed a justice of peace for the Borough of Dorchester in April 1884. This fact, in his opinion, might have influenced the scene, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, in which Henchard judges the old furmity-woman.

Henchard becomes successful, and is described by a Casterbridge inhabitant as "a pillar of the town" (*MC*, Chapter V, 35). After the revelation of his wife sale at Weydon Fair, his reputation declines and, combined with his economic problems, contributes to his general decline (*MC*, Chapter XXXI, 216).

Henchard is thus similar to Mastro-don Gesualdo of Verga's eponymous novel: they both reach a prosperous and prestigious status from nothing (from low class to upper class but also from upper class back to low class in the case of Henchard); both lose the affection of the ones they love; both have illegitimate daughters (Henchard knows it, Mastro-don Gesualdo does not); both jeopardise their respective daughters' sentimental happiness (although Elizabeth-Jane marries Donald in the end); both have irritable, passionate, strong characters; both end up emotionally alone. One major difference is that Mastro-don Gesualdo is native to Vizzini, and lives and works there until his removal to Palermo at the end of the novel, while Henchard is not of Casterbridge, but almost always positively contributes to its economy. However, both are not fully integrated with



the community: Henchard is accepted and respected as long as he prospers economically; Mastro-don Gesualdo is ostracised by the whole community of Vizzini – with the exception of Diodata and Mastro Nardo, and the episode where he provides accommodation and provisions during the cholera epidemic.

In his temperament, his profession, the failures in his personal relationships, and the social decline from which he suffers, Henchard can also be compared to old John Gourlay, the protagonist of George Douglas Brown's tragic regional novel *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901).

According to Millgate (1971: 226-227), Henchard is a man of uncontrolled passions, but is also self-alienated.<sup>65</sup> Southerington (1971: 96-97) sees him as a character in isolation, also as a consequence of his actions and nature. For this critic, Henchard is able to adjust to the social and economic changes which affect Casterbridge because he has the power, while Farfrae has the skills. The social background is important, but Henchard's isolation and alienation from the community are due to personal reasons, related to his inability to treat others with respect and affection. He lacks a sense of community; he does not learn from experience, like many characters in Hardy's novels (Southerington: 1971: 100-104). His character is therefore not particularly regional, in the sense that the environment interferes only in part with his actions, and his profession could be carried out in other agricultural areas of the country.

Moreover, Schweik (1991: 140) argues that "Hardy describes Henchard's journey from Casterbridge to Weydon Priors as a kind of pilgrimage carried out 'as an act of penance'." In this sense, he can be compared to Efix in *Canne al*

*vento*, for whom, as we have seen, his own pilgrimage has also expiatory purposes.

As soon as Henchard is shown in his capacity as mayor and prosperous business man, Hardy introduces Farfrae, the young Scottish man, the modern outsider who comes to Henchard's rescue (in relation to the problem with grown wheat) and will condition, mostly involuntarily, Henchard's and Elizabeth-Jane's destinies. The emphasis in his portrait is on his strangeness to the place, on his being an outsider, not just in his physical description, but also through his accent (*MC*, Chapter VI, 37). Farfrae agrees to work for Henchard; he is welcomed within the local community; and the locals' appreciation is shown from the start, when he sings at the King of Prussia Inn, and later when he prospers as Henchard's manager and independent dealer. Farfrae's determination to improve his economic status is also shown by his sentence: "It's better to stay at home, and that's true; but a man must live where his money is made. It is a great pity, but it's even so! [...]" (*MC*, Chapter XXIII, 156-157). This reflection can be compared to 'Ntoni Malavoglia's similar attitude, which leads the young man to leave Aci Trezza to acquire a better social and economic position for himself and his family. On the contrary, Mena and Alfio of *I Malavoglia*, Efix of *Canne al vento*, and Clym and Thomasin of *The Return of the Native*, consider their native place the one they should try to live in, even without achieving prosperity.

Elizabeth-Jane and Susan are also initially outsiders in Casterbridge, as they come from a seaside village. Elizabeth-Jane is modest and quiet. She values intellectual refinement, but she later appears to be an unlucky person, and Fate

("her malignant star" in *MC*, Chapter XXIV, 165), seems to act against her (*MC*, Chapter XXV, 178). For Millgate (1971: 228), however, Elizabeth-Jane has an extraordinary role; she is the most acute and reliable intelligence among the characters.

Lucetta, the woman both Henchard and Farfrae desire, is described as a pretty lady of French origins, older than Elizabeth-Jane, but less mature than her (*MC*, Chapter XXII, 147-148). Merryn Williams correctly sees Lucetta as another outsider within the community, whose wealth offers her the chance to dominate it temporarily. Elizabeth-Jane is her alter ego; she has to learn to be patient and somehow stoic towards the unlucky circumstances of her life. With her moral code, she also becomes conventional and accepted within the community, unlike her step-father and Lucetta (Williams 1972: 153).

The relationship between Henchard and Farfrae is of love-hate for Henchard, who sees the Scot as almost a relative (because he reminds him of his own brother), but also as a rival (because Farfrae is appreciated by Henchard's own employers). Farfrae, however, sees it as only professional. Hardy also stresses the opposite natures of the two antagonists (*MC*, Chapter XVII, 112). The rivalry between Henchard and Farfrae is professional, in the corn and hay trade, and also sentimental, for Lucetta.

When Jopp divulges Lucetta's love letters addressed to Henchard at the Saint Peter's Finger Inn in Mixen Lane, Hardy presents this part of Casterbridge as inhabited by the low classes, poachers, or by those who had been forced to leave their businesses (as copyholders and lifeholders): "Mixen Lane was the

Adullam of all the surrounding villages. It was the hiding-place of those who were in distress, and in debt, and trouble of every kind" (*MC*, Chapter XXXVI, 252). Unlike *The Return of the Native*, in which the minor characters were generally simple, innocent people, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* Hardy shows 'the other side' of the local society, separated from the well-to-do not only socially and economically, but also geographically.

According to Showalter (1991: 150), the community of Casterbridge has initial affinities with Henchard's character before the arrival of Farfrae, Susan and Elizabeth-Jane: "it pulls itself in, refuses contact with its surroundings." In my opinion, this is not true: either Henchard or the local community are open to the new arrivals, and Casterbridge, functioning as the meeting point of country and town, is certainly open to the outside world.

Millgate (1971: 232-233) rightly believes that there is a minor choral function in the rustic characters in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* if compared to that of the minor characters in *The Return of the Native*. In fact, the role of the rustic people in Hardy's novels varies: as Randall Williams also argues, in some of them, for example in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Hardy dedicates his entire work to the representation of their simple life, while in the tragedies their presence functions as an 'interlude' from the more dramatic development of the plot. Nevertheless, their presence is fundamental, because they also remind the reader that despite the problems and conflicts experienced by the main protagonists, life still goes on for ordinary human beings. The rustic characters could also be seen as the 'Chorus' of Greek tragedies, because they often serve to introduce the main



characters and also offer their commentary on the events of the plot. Although they are strongly linked to their environment, they are also open to learn more about what lies outside it (Randall Williams 1924: 106-107 and 109).

Thus, apart from the minor rustic characters who are certainly regional either for their origins or profession, the protagonists of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are all new arrivals in town, including Henchard, who integrates into it but later has to leave it. Moreover, Henchard and Farfrae are not, in my opinion, completely regional in their managerial professions, which can also be performed elsewhere, and are not specialised enough – as are, for example, the furze-cutters in *The Return of the Native*. However, Henchard is more regional in his role as hay-trusser, because this profession is strictly related to the economy and environment of the Casterbridge area. Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane are also not native to Casterbridge – Farfrae is even Scottish – so initially they are not properly ‘regional’ or at ease in the environment of Casterbridge, but at the end of the novel they are nevertheless the best integrated ones – Elizabeth-Jane also linguistically in her employment of the local dialect.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, according to Sumner, Hardy’s characters are psychologically disturbed,<sup>67</sup> because they are modern, intelligent human beings who have lost faith in a benign deity, and for whom it is hard to find a balance between mind and body. In this troubled condition, those who can still maintain a sense of unity with Nature have more chance of survival (1981: 1). For example, Clym survives and partially achieves his goal to help mankind because of his strong relation with the heath. In fact, Clym, the advanced thinker, is set in a world which is gradually



accepting industrial change but which is not ready yet to accept the consequent transformations brought to society and individuals (Sumner 1981: 99). This interpretation of Hardy's characters certainly provides further elements for discussion, and highlights the fact that their being in an intermediate stage between tradition and modernity is probably an important cause of their psychological and emotional instability. The latter might also be related to what Hillis Miller defines as the 'death desire', the suicidal and self-destructive passivity of many of Hardy's characters (1970: 218-222).

#### *IV.8 Language*

As Brinkley (1969: 164) explains,

The narrative style of a novel may be regional both in descriptive and conversational passages. In the former the novelist will introduce local words and phrases into 'Standard English' without any comment, where its context explains its meaning [...]. At other times he will add a comment for readers who will not know its meaning [...]. This use of local words increases the authenticity of a writer's presentation of local life and is sometimes absolutely necessary where a local word has no exact parallel in 'Standard English'.

Numerous critics and contemporary writers have discussed Hardy's language. Henry James and T. S. Eliot criticised it for its heaviness, clumsiness and archaic features. Others, instead, saw in these the reappraisal of Anglo-Saxon elements and Hardy's own indebtedness to the classics, or as Ralph Elliott has it, the 'timelessness' of Hardy's English.<sup>68</sup> Taylor's following comment seems to summarise the main characteristics of Hardy's language and their contributions to the English language:

Hardy's challenge to his contemporary language seems both synchronic and diachronic. That is, his word choices are drawn from competing classes of language, standard, dialect, poetic, technical, which seem to create a babel of classes, over against the class-conscious nature of the current language. Also, his word choices are drawn from temporal classes of diction, archaic, obsolescent, newly coined, in a way that seems to challenge the temporal equilibrium of the current language. Nurtured by historical philology, Hardy does not choose to write in a non-standard dialect (like Barnes), but to challenge the standard language from within, while also developing its expressiveness. This expressiveness is intimately connected with his project to show the manifold ways in which history interpenetrates present thinking and feeling. (1993: 4)

Taylor also believes that Hardy's language challenges not only the stylistic traditions of the genres, but also the conventionalities of the language *per se*. However, unlike other writers, Hardy does not create nor provide new linguistic norms; he only challenges existing ones, and he introduces non-standard options in order to make his language and style richer and more expressive (Taylor 1993: 7 and 19). Taylor also highlights the awkwardness and dramatic inappropriateness of Hardy's language, but he also values its expressiveness: "A common pattern in criticism is to cite Hardy's awkwardness and then note its expressiveness, or sincerity, or local effectiveness" (Taylor 1993: 35).

Hardy's linguistic choices are usually divided into two types: learned idioms and local lexicon, a division that also represents the two tendencies in Hardy as the literary imitator and as the local traditionalist. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, this is exemplified in the contrast between standard and non-standard speech: Henchard criticises Elizabeth-Jane's usage of dialectal expressions.<sup>69</sup> For Taylor (1993: 33 and 277), however, Hardy does not use only two classes of language, learned and local, but many of them, giving his language a heterogeneous status. In the next pages, I shall first present and discuss some of the features of Hardy's

prose and his employment of Standard English, and then focus my analysis on Hardy's usage of Dorset dialectal features, which are key elements for the analysis of the regionalism of his novels.

As regards Hardy's Standard English, it is characterised by its variety of vocabulary, the employment of ancient, classical, rare and often obsolete words, and by clumsy and lengthy constructions and sentences. It often includes borrowings especially from Latin and Greek (Chapman 1990: 46-48), references to the Bible,<sup>70</sup> to the Greek tragedies, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Milton, and others; this was a common stylistic strategy of the Victorian age (Chapman 1990: 51-53).<sup>71</sup> As discussed in chapter II, Verga also borrowed from literary Italian, and employed 'Tuscanisms' in *I Malavoglia* and especially in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. Hardy's works also include references to science and contemporary thinkers, and analogies with architecture and painting.<sup>72</sup>

For these reasons, his language may appear artificial, and attempting to impress the reader through a wealth of allusion. For Chapman, however, the artificiality of Hardy's language can be due to his own failings or to the fictional conventions of the time. In fact, previous writers were seen as authorities, and central characters had to speak good English, even though dialect was becoming more acceptable for serious characters. Hardy made an unnecessary use of rare words, untidy sentence construction, lack of decorum in mixing the learned and the colloquial (Chapman 1990: 36). Moreover, according to Page (1980: 159-161), Hardy's style may also appear pedantic and too fond of unusual words

because of his concern for precision, and many of his stylistic choices, like digressions and prolixity, were influenced by the demands of Victorian publishers, especially by the needs of the multi-volumed novel and serialisation. This type of pressure was not present in the Italian publishing world of the time, and therefore Verga could not have been influenced by it for example in his selection of Tuscanisms. Perhaps, for Verga's and Hardy's respective employment of literary, pompous, and contextually inappropriate lexemes and expressions, autodidacticism was partly to blame.

In Hardy, we also find the 'language of Nature'. Chapman (1990: 66-69) says that Hardy was one of the last English writers to come close to Nature, which for him was a powerful force. Despite some liberties he takes in the time of flowering, he offered a detailed description of the countryside flora, and accurate portrayals of the countryside. However, this also occurs in Deledda, and D. H. Lawrence who, especially in *The White Peacock*, employs a detailed lexicon of Nature, and offers elaborate descriptions of the local flora.

Chapman (1990: 76-78) believes that Hardy was not a creator of entirely new words, but more the employer of words in striking contexts, or in unusual combinations, or even in new compound forms. He contributed to the survival of many Dorset words in the literary corpus. He frequently employed *enumeratio*, thus creating a cumulative effect of words and adjectives: for example, see the description of Casterbridge from Susan and Elizabeth-Jane's point of view.

Chapman (1990: 141-149 and 153) also highlights the poetic qualities of Hardy's prose, his sensitivity to sound (bells, wind, water, and animals –

especially birds), the references to music, secular songs and hymns. Hardy employed onomatopoeia, but not often alliteration. For Ralph Elliott, Hardy's shows a 'cumbersome' employment of prepositions and the maintenance of reflexive pronouns when they are more commonly omitted (1993: 276 and 278 respectively).

Hardy usually makes his characters speak their own words, and his use of reported speech is rare. He rarely used 'free indirect style' (Chapman 1990: 133), but he employed variations in register according to the social circumstances (Chapman 1990: 135).

Finally, the presence of the omniscient, moralising narrator, also highlighted by Page (1980: 156),<sup>73</sup> is particularly important and also a main difference between Hardy and Verga. It is by means of the narratorial interventions that Hardy shows his knowledge and education. These often appear inappropriate or excessive, and negatively affect the realistic rendering of the lives, thoughts, and actions of many of his characters. Hardy's use of Standard English can therefore be described as conventional, in the sense that he had to follow the rules of Victorian publishing, as with the structure of his novels; but he can also be partially described as innovative or experimental in the introduction of rare and old-fashioned words, which also contributed to the unique character of his style.

As regards Hardy's employment of dialect and local idioms, the author showed a positive attitude towards the Dorset dialect, which he considered an ancient tongue with its own characteristics.<sup>74</sup> This dialect, according to Trudgill



(1999: 43), belongs to the Southern English dialects, specifically to the Western Southwest variety.<sup>75</sup> Hardy's purpose was to give the impression of how the speech of certain characters was 'different' from the educated norm. In this way, Hardy emphasised their differences in status within the community, their social position, the context, their regionalism, and their integration into the locality. For example, Elizabeth-Jane, who is a newcomer to Casterbridge, shows her integration by adopting some dialectal words and idioms that are much criticised by her stepfather.

As Brinkley (1969: 164) also explains, Hardy inserts local words, proverbs,<sup>76</sup> and idioms in a passage written in Standard English, so that his readers may notice the characteristics of the local dialect while still being able to understand its meaning. As this critic says, these dialectal items function "as reminders of the 'locality' of his novels and as the proper means of describing local life" (*ibid.*). Instances of dialect usage include: "'I'm as dry as a *kex* with biding up here in the wind, and I haven't seen the colour of drink since *nammet-time* to-day [...]" (*RN*, Book I, Chapter III, 31) (emphasis mine), and:

The pessimist still maintained a negative: "Pulling down is more the *nater* of Weydon. There were five houses cleared away last year, and three this; and the *fokes* nowhere to go – no, not so much as a thatched hurdle; that's the way o' Weydon-Priors." (*MC*, Chapter I, 5) (emphasis mine)

Moreover, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* contains not only examples of Dorset dialect, but also of Scots. When Farfrae's 'foreign accent' is presented, Hardy not only stresses this difference by means of his characters or the narrator, as in: "Elizabeth-Jane had seen his movements and heard the words, which attracted her both by their subject and by their accent – a strange one for those parts. It was

quaint and northerly” (*MC*, Chapter VI, 37), but he also highlights it typographically, as the following examples show:

“My name is Donald Farfrae. It is true that I am in the *corern* trade – but I have replied to no *advartisement*, and arranged to see no one. I am on my way to Bristol – from there to the other side of the *warrld* to try my fortune in the great wheat-growing districts of the West? I have some inventions useful to the trade, and there is no scope for developing them *heere*. (*MC*, Chapter VII, 46) (emphasis mine)

Farfrae’s Scottishness is also emphasised in his singing Scottish songs. In the same novel, dialect and also informal speech is used by the Mixen Lane dwellers, as in “beest”, “sware” (*MC*, Chapter XXXVI, 255), and by Elizabeth-Jane and even her father, who combines it with Standard English. In the last part of the novel he often employs dialect because he has regressed to a low-class condition.

As Chapman explains (1990: 116), Hardy conveys dialect through lexis and syntax as well as pronunciation. As the same critic argues (1990: 113),

His [Hardy’s] purpose was not to reproduce in the reader’s imagining ear the precise aural experience of listening to Dorset peasants, but to give the impression of how the speech of certain characters differed from the educated norm. In so doing, he did not want to arouse laughter – though there is plenty of humour in some of the rustic scenes – but to suggest levels of status in the community, relationships and emotional responses.

In fact, Chapman (1990: 114-116) accurately discusses the sounds of dialect speech reproduced typographically in Hardy’s works: for example the loss of consonantal sounds in a cluster of two or more consonants; the occasional removal of a medial consonant where it would not normally be pronounced in southern speech, perhaps to emphasise the shortness of the vowels; the voicing of certain consonants, in particular *v* for *f* (“voot” *MC*, Chapter XVII, 110) and *z* for *s*, which is a traditional feature of south-western English; and the changes in

vowel sounds.<sup>77</sup> Other deviant spellings include indications of colloquial speech, such as the weakened forms like *'tis*, *'twere*; spellings like *nater* for “nature” and *winder* for “window”. Others are closer to standard colloquial speech, as in syncopic forms like *b'elieve*, *o'* and *penneth* (‘pennyworth’).<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, even though Hardy’s employment of dialectal elements in grammar is characterised especially by pronouns (for example, Old English forms for the first person singular personal pronoun) and verbs (as in *have* for *has*, *do* for *does*), it is also possible to extend it to nouns (uninflected and plural forms) and to articles (omission, *a* instead of *an*).<sup>79</sup> More specifically, as Chapman (1990: 118) illustrates, the pronoun *a* stands for “he” or “I” and *en* for “him”. Furthermore, the second person singular is “used familiarly to one person as it had been universally in English at an earlier time, with pronouns *thy*, *thou*, and verbal forms *wast*, *dostn't*, *how'st do?*” (Chapman 1990: 118). Other dialectal verbal features include: *be* as a personed verb (“I be”, “we be”); weak past forms of strong verbs like *knowed*, *feeled*, *seed* or *zeed*; the use of the present tense for past events as in “says she”; and the disregard of case in pronouns as in “hard for she”, “nothing to I”, which is distinctive of the traditional south-western speech (Chapman 1990: 118).

Furthermore, as Chapman illustrates (1990: 117), Hardy uses local words instead of Standard English ones, even when the latter are available, to show (in my opinion) the integration of his characters within the locality. For example: *bide* (Elizabeth-Jane in *MC*, Chapter XX, 127), “remain”; and *homealong*, “homewards”. He also employs words derived from Old English, including

*barton*, “farmyard”; *coomb*, “valley”; *dorp*, “village”. He highlights mispronunciations among the rustic people, as in *mischty*, “mischief”, *maphrotight*, “hermaphrodite”, and chooses words that require a glossary, as *durn*, *larry*, *rafted*, *shrammed*, *sumple*, *vamp*, *wanzing*. Other local expressions are “call home” for the publication of banns of marriage; “go snacks with” for sharing; “mops and brooms” for the disorder of sense after heavy drinking (Chapman 1990: 117).

Finally, as we have seen, dialectal items usually occur in the dialogues among rustic characters, and denote elements of rural life and work, customs and nature, as Ralph Elliott argues (1993: 41). Moreover, according to the same critic (1993: 37-39), Hardy’s dialect vocabulary and certain grammatical and phonological features belonged to western and south-western areas, and were not circumscribed to Dorset. Ralph Elliott (1993: 41) divides them into words of wider dialectal currency (particularly in the north, west, and south-west of England), words of restricted dialectal currency (mainly occurring in Hardy’s Wessex), words principally confined to Dorset, and phrases and dialectal corruption which Hardy uses to add further “dialectal verisimilitude.”<sup>80</sup>

The frequency of imprecations and swearing among Hardy’s major characters is limited, with, as Ralph Elliott (1993: 225) suggests, the exception of Henchard, who occasionally employs expressions such as *curse me*, *be hanged*, *’Od damn it*, *by heavens*, *dammy*, *Good God*. Elliott (1993: 226) also points out that the recurrence of “full-blooded oaths” invoking God is certainly high. For

example, he mentions Clym's imprecation "'Good heart of God!'" in *The Return of the Native* (Book V, Chapter II, 316).

Therefore, Hardy's employment of dialectal features in *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is very important for the maintenance of the regional 'character' of the novel. As we have seen, it occurs at lexical, grammatical and phonological levels, especially in the rustic characters' speech of both novels, in Elizabeth-Jane, and also in Henchard in the concluding part of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; and it does so without impairing the understanding of the text. Moreover, it serves to emphasise the characters' belonging to the locality, their social status and the context of the speech, and perfectly complements Hardy's sometimes original usage of Standard English.

#### *IV.9 Conclusion*

This analysis of Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* has shown that, despite the influence of the tragic and realistic modes, of the pastoral genre and the Classics, these novels can be considered regional because of the fundamental role of their respective settings, the representation of the local social and cultural background and customs, and the employment of the dialect of the area. The settings, the isolated, traditional and almost unique Egdon Heath, and the country town of Casterbridge, are in fact geographically, socially, and temporally localised, and in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the characters are placed there also to experience certain economic changes that influence the development of the plot. Their social and professional roles are fundamental in both novels, and



contribute to the regionalism of the books, as in the case of the furze-cutters of Egdon Heath, or the hay-trussers of Casterbridge. In fact, Hardy's attention focuses mainly on the independent, intermediate class, and on mobility within classes, of which both Clym and Henchard are examples (mobility through education and within classes respectively). The characters' relation with the local environment or the absence of it is also another key element in *The Return of the Native*. Clym, in fact, is 'embedded' in the Heath, while his wife Eustacia is hostile to it and certainly never integrates into the community and the environment. Moreover, by means of the characters' employment of dialect and local idioms, Hardy emphasises their different status within their communities, as in the case of the rustic characters, and especially their relation to and integration within the locality, as in Elizabeth-Jane's case.

In conclusion, as Brinkley emphasises (1969: 168), the success of Hardy's regional works also encouraged other writers to present the life of a particular area or region. Like Deledda, in fact, Hardy showed that a close description of a particular area need not make a novel less universal in its interest, as Brinkley (*ibid.*) suggests.<sup>81</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, Hardy's influence on the works of D. H. Lawrence was certainly decisive. In fact, according to Draper (1989: 4),

it was Hardy who promoted regionalism to its special position in the English imagination. The secret, of course, lies in his unique relationship to the region – born and bred in it, but becoming intellectually detached from it, and thus both feeling it on his pulse, and yet recreating it as an imaginative counterpoise to what he had experienced of the modern, extra-regional world. Hardy, in fact, is a watershed; after him Lawrence, Faulkner, Grassie Gibbon and Neil Gunn can also work with a feeling for region that is deeply rooted in personal experience, while recognising that the integration of such

experience with a culture and a community which is facing a spiritual crisis endows the created region with a paradoxically immediate and transcendent significance.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Florence Emily Hardy 1962: 3.

<sup>2</sup> On the economic and agricultural changes that took place during Hardy's life, cf. Millgate 1982: 35.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Page 1977: 9 defines this novel as a 'village love-story'.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Millgate 1982: 168.

<sup>5</sup> Millgate (2004: 332) also explains that: "Hardy seems from the first to have conceived of Wessex as possessing a more than purely regional integrity, as becoming in course of time and composition a distinct, internally coherent fictional entity, an imaginative construct grounded in geographical actuality."

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Millgate 1982: 188. For a discussion of the evolution of this novel throughout its various editions, see Gatrell 1988: 27-31, 33-34, 36-37, 39-45 and 47.

<sup>7</sup> Millgate also discusses Hardy's "exploitation of a regional setting", like Scott and Blackmore. On the evolution of this novel and the various changes provided by Hardy in its various editions, cf. Gatrell 1988: 75-80.

<sup>8</sup> According to Page 1977: 18-19, Hardy's abandonment of fictional prose was related to his economic reassurance due to his success as a novelist and his lack of interest in the theory of the novel.

<sup>9</sup> On these topics, cf. Gatrell 1988: 118-134, and for the representation of the Dorset dialect *ibid.* 176-185, 220-222.

<sup>10</sup> Hardy divided his fictional works, including his short stories, into the following categorisations: 'Novels of Character and Environment', 'Romances and Fantasies' and 'Novels of Ingenuity'. Also see Widdowson's comment on Hardy's classification 1989: 17: "Hardy, in other words, himself encourages the categorization of his work and the establishment of a selective 'canon'; his emphasis may only echo the reviewers' discriminations and rankings hitherto, but it also helps to reinforce them."

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Slade in Hardy 1999: xxxix.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Slade in Hardy 1999: xliii-xliv, quotation xliii.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lea 1977: 67.

<sup>14</sup> For a definition of the term 'reddleman' cf. *RN*, endnote 1 to Book First, Chapter II, 398: "A reddleman is one who sells or deals in 'reddle', a form of red ochre dye once widely used by shepherds and farmers to mark and identify sheep."

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Wilson in Hardy 1997: xlv.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion of the various versions of the novel, and of the related changes, cf. Wilson, in Hardy 1997: xlv-l.

<sup>17</sup> In particular by the furnity-lady who had sold him the furnity and the rum at the fair (which had caused his drunkenness), and who, having become a beggar, had been arrested and brought to judgement in front of Henchard, acting as the town magistrate in the absence of the mayor.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Merryn Williams 1972: 15, and 51 on Austen. Similarly to the *racconto* or *romanzo campagnolo* in Italy, the countryside people represented in the British country novels of the time appeared as inferiors to be patronised by the squirearchy, whose affairs and loves constituted the main topic of this type of fiction. From the 1840s, mob action and rebellion started to be introduced in these novels. Cf. Merryn Williams 1972: 50-52.

<sup>19</sup> A similar view is shared by Millgate 1971: 219-220.

<sup>20</sup> For Boumelha 1982: 48, *The Return of the Native* can also be seen as "an attempt to unite prose romance, dramatic form, and psychological or social theory; as an exercise in mock-heroic, replete with parodic allusions to the conventions of courtly love; as a direct descendant of the ballad tradition; and as a modified pastoral."

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Beach 1962: 4 and 97 on the influence of Greek tragedy, and 15 on Shakespeare.

<sup>22</sup> Millgate also mentions Paterson's idea that, although the novel might have had its origins as a pastoral, it employed allusions to the classical drama, and also some of its features. It is true, in fact, that Egdon Heath as the only setting of the novel could provide the unity of place required in classical drama.

<sup>23</sup> Also cf. Millgate (2004: 26): "As has often been noticed, Jemima's ambitions for her eldest son – and for herself through her son – are strikingly similar to Mrs Morel's ambitions for Paul in *Sons and Lovers*, and some of the other tensions so powerfully dramatized in Lawrence's novel had their milder counterparts within the Hardy's household."

<sup>24</sup> According to Björk, Hardy also saw Ancient Greece as a place of happiness, despite some faults cf. Björk in Page ed. 1980: 118-120. Hardy was also influenced by positivist thinkers and writers: Darwin (cf. Robinson in Page ed. 1980: 128-150), Comte and his theory of "affective psychology" and of man as an affective being (cf. Björk in Page ed. 1980: 104-105, 107-109 and 111-112), and Matthew Arnold (cf. Björk in Page ed. 1980: 122).

<sup>25</sup> As Lerner 1975: 62 says, "Avoiding the term Stoic, let us speak of a philosophy of quiet acceptance of one's lot, an awareness of suffering which teaches one to avoid the excessive emotions of joy and fear, pity and sorrow. The representative of such an attitude in *The Mayor* is clearly Elizabeth-Jane."

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Merryn and Raymond Williams in Page ed. 1980: 29, and 31-32. Some of the inhabitants of Mixen Lane in Casterbridge originally belonged to this class: they were decent people who lost their rural businesses: cf. *MC*, Chapter XXXVI, 253.

<sup>27</sup> This theme is also discussed by Millgate 2004: 30.

<sup>28</sup> On the condition of Dorset people, Hardy wrote an essay entitled "The Dorsetshire Labourer", published in the July issue of the *Longman Magazine* in 1883. Hardy emphasises the increasingly nomadic life of the Dorset labourer (Millgate 1971: 208-209). Hardy's essay was published in the *Longman Magazine*, 2 (July 1883), 252-269, as Millgate specifies in endnote 1 to Chapter 2, Part Four (1971: 393). According to Page 1977: 137, Hardy also shows his good knowledge of countryfolk lifestyle and habits in "The Dorsetshire Labourer", and his attitude is not sentimental, but practical and realistic. Millgate also offers another interesting analysis of the essay in his later biography (2004: 219-220). For example, he emphasises the fact that Hardy "viewed the depressed state of agriculture in the early 1880s as less than disastrous" (2004: 219).

<sup>29</sup> According to Hardy's Preface to the 1895 edition of *The Return of the Native*; cf. "Appendix A: The Preface to 1895 and the Postscript to 1912", in *The Return of the Native* 429. Slade, however, does not believe that the most plausible years represented in the novel could be those between 1842-43, and postpones the historical setting to the 1860s, the years of Hardy's youth and early manhood, especially because of some realistic and autobiographical elements presented in this work, which could not be remembered by a two- or three-year old child as Hardy would have been in 1842-3. Cf. Slade in Hardy 1999: 432 (Appendix A). In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the initial historical background is presented in the text: "On evening of late summer, before the present century had reached its thirtieth year" (*MC*, Chapter I, 3).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Fforde 1994: 94.

<sup>31</sup> James Caird's map, from *English Agriculture in 1850-1*, London, 1852, is mentioned in Millgate 1971: 217, and in Merryn Williams 1972: 2 and 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Merryn Williams 1972: 117-120. The influences of the prospects of a good or bad harvest on prices are discussed in the novel (*MC*, Chapter XXVI, 183).

<sup>33</sup> As illustrated by the narratorial comment: "Now, since Egdon was populated with heath-croppers and furze-cutters rather than with sheep and shepherds" (*RN*, Book II, Chapter VII, 147).

<sup>34</sup> According to Wilson (*MC* note 1 to Chapter I, 325), Weydon-Priors corresponds to Weyhill, a hamlet near Andover, famous for its fair which took place during the second week of October.

<sup>35</sup> Widdowson 1989: 59 also sees Hardy's own purpose in writing his fiction on Wessex "to preserve . . . a fairly true record of a vanishing life", as the same author argued in the 1912 General Preface of the Wessex Edition of his works. Hardy's nostalgia is also mentioned *ibid.* 61. Widdowson 1989: 39 also argues that: "It is immediately striking, amongst the huge mass of Hardy criticism, how little of it has considered him seriously and historically as a social novelist concerned with the composition of the rural economy, with class, property, and gender relations."

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Merryn Williams 1972: 104 and 110-111. On Lea, cf. footnote 13 of this chapter.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *RN*, Book I, Chapter I, 11-12 and Book III, Chapter II, 173. For the description of the heath, cf. *ibid.* Book I, Chapter I, 9-12.



<sup>38</sup> Randall Williams 1924: 66-68 sees Nature as a complement to human emotions in *The Return of the Native*, but also as a titanic form, that acts on earth and its beings unsympathetically. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the harmonious setting is a complement of Henchard's personality and actions (*ibid.*, Chapter II, 16), thus not a protagonist in itself.

<sup>39</sup> Millgate 2004: 390 also adds that Hardy, in two passages of his *Handbook*, explained "that the fictional Wessex corresponded not to Dorset alone but to 'the Wessex of history' and that the towns, villages, and houses given fictional names were only 'suggested' by such and such real places", even though they might in practice be quite readily identifiable."

<sup>40</sup> According to Wilson, Weydon-Prior corresponds to Weyhill, a village in Hampshire not far from Andover; cf. *MC*, endnote 1, 325.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Wilson *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Another description of Casterbridge that highlights its status of a countryside town can be found in *MC* 88-89.

<sup>43</sup> Kay-Robinson 1972: 15, 19 and 25 on Casterbridge/Dorchester, and 57, 59, 61 on Egdon Heath, also discusses the links between the fictional Wessex, including Casterbridge and Egdon Heath, and their correspondence with Dorchester and the heath. According to him, it seems possible to identify some buildings in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and some of the houses and hamlets in *The Return of the Native* with the ones that existed and might still exist today or at least be partially recognisable.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hardy 1976 and 1988 respectively.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Millgate 1971: 248 and 345 and 2004: 231. Also cf. Wing in Page 1980: 79-81.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Enstice 1979: x for *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as an "'enclosed' landscape" and a complete world. On Dorchester *ibid.* 12, 14, 16, 18, 20-22, 24, 27-28.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Widdowson 1989: 56 and *ibid.* 57 for Hardy as "the poet of the English landscape".

<sup>48</sup> On the origins of bonfires in Wessex, cf. *RN*, Book I, Chapter III, 20 and the related note 4, 399-400.

<sup>49</sup> According to Ciccia 1967: 88, the partition of the hair is related to the mediaeval tradition of the *tose* (presumably from *tosare*, "to shear"): Longobard women had their hair cut when they got married.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *RN*, note 2 p. 121, explained on 413. According to Millgate 1971: 135, the St. George play "embodied an ancient myth of the annual cycle of nature's death and renewal". It is also related to the November bonfires and the Maypole dancing, other recurrent pagan observances and celebrations of the area.

<sup>51</sup> On this festivity, also cf. Brinkley 1969: 162-164.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *RN*, note 4 to I.v., 403: "A 'club' was a parish group organized so as to collect money to provide family benefits, nominally in the event of sickness or death. Members would walk together or move in a loose procession on certain holidays."

<sup>53</sup> Also see the pricking episode in *RN* 176 of which Eustacia is victim.

<sup>54</sup> On Hardy's agnostic views, cf. Millgate 2004: especially 41 and 230, Tomalin 2006: 78 and 223. On Hardy's belief in an 'Immanent Will' cf. Hillis Miller 1970: xiv and 13-15.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *MC*, endnote 13, 349 (note by Wilson).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *MC*, endnote 6, 360 (note by Wilson).

<sup>57</sup> In fact, Wildeve proposes to go to America with her after he has failed to marry Thomasin at the beginning of the novel: cf. *RN*, Book I, Chapter IX, 87, and Book I, Chapter XI, 102.

<sup>58</sup> Also cf. Hillis Miller 1970: xii: "Two themes are woven throughout the totality of Hardy's work [...]: distance and desire – distance as the source of desire and desire as the energy behind attempts to turn distance into closeness."

<sup>59</sup> As he tells some of the local people (*RN*, Book III, Chapter I, 171). Collins, in Page 1980: 62-63, however, criticises the generic and imprecise references to Clym's readings and models.

<sup>60</sup> Another thing in common between these two characters is the changes their complexions undergo throughout the novel: Clym's complexion, like that of Elias Portolu, is no longer pale some time after his return to Egdon Heath (*RN*, Book III, Chapter V, 204), and even more so after he has started working as a furze-cutter (*RN*, Book IV, Chapter VI, 274).



<sup>61</sup> Thomasin declares her love for her native place: "'I like what I was born near to; I admire its grim old face.'" (*RN*, Book V, Chapter VII, 340), and reaffirms her preference for country life to Clym after Wildeve's and Eustacia's deaths. Both characters, in fact, like the countryside and Egdon Heath, and at least accept to live there, because they are not fit for town life and are 'countrified' in any case: cf. *RN*, Book VI, Chapter III, 385.

<sup>62</sup> Boumelha 1982: 57 is one of the critics who highlight the similarities between Mrs Yeobright and Mrs Morel in their mother-son respective relationships, and also Mrs Morel's indebtedness to her literary predecessor Mrs Yeobright.

<sup>63</sup> On the 'regionalism' of the characters of *The Return of the Native* also cf. Brinkley 1969: 159-162, in particular 162: "All the characters in *The Return of the Native* are regional since they are affected by their environment. [...] The characters in this novel are both local and universal. They are greatly affected in a variety of ways by the particular environment of Egdon, but they also illustrate the relationship between a locality and the people who live there. Their universality saves them from being of merely local interest, while their association with a particular locality increases their reality in the mind of the reader."

<sup>64</sup> Cf. note 4 to Chapter IV in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, 327-328: "Hardy found West Country examples of wife-sale in the *Dorset County Chronicle*, whose issues from the 1820s on he began exploring in early 1884. He copied details of three sales into his 'Facts from Newspapers, Histories, Biographies, & other chronicles' notebook (DCM), kept with a view to using some of the unusual episodes it records in his fiction. Given the wife's price and the horse-trading mode of her delivery, one of these entries, dated 6 December 1827, is particularly relevant: 'Selling wife. At Buckland, nr. Frome, a labring [*sic*] man named Charles Pearce sold wife to shoemaker named Elton for £ 5, & delivered her in a halter in the public street. She seemed very willing. Bells rang.' See Christine Winfield, 'Factual Sources of Two Episodes in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*' (*Nineteenth Century Fiction* 25 [1970], 224-31)." The same quotation is mentioned in Millgate 1971: 241; according to Millgate, this could be the actual episode that Hardy employed in his novel (242). Millgate *ibid.* also mentions John Timbs's book *Things Not Generally Known, Faithfully Explained* (1856) as another source for wife-sale's cases and apparently well-known to Hardy.

<sup>65</sup> According to Hillis Miller 1970: 116, the void and the longing experienced by Henchard makes him "try to seek happiness through possession of another person." However, Showalter 1991: 149 proposes a different view of Henchard: in her opinion, it is "[...] an absence of feeling which Henchard looks to others to supply, a craving unfocused loneliness rather than a desire towards another person."

<sup>66</sup> However, it seems important to mention that Farfrae's popularity among the people of Casterbridge decreases in the course of the novel, especially after he has become mayor and a prosperous businessman: cf. *MC*, Chapter XXXVIII, 264-265.

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed psychological analysis of both characters, cf. Sumner 1981: 59-65, 71-73 and 81. Sumner 1981: 58 also sees Hardy as a precursor of Freud and Jung. She also argues that (3): "D.H. Lawrence explored the same problems in a much more extreme form in an industrialised society. Here again the two writers share the same concerns, and we can see Hardy embarking on a subject which Lawrence was to deal with more fully."

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Ralph Elliott 1984: 9: "It is both ancient and modern, one moment stilted archaic and the next contemporary colloquial. It manages to be Anglo-Saxon Wessex and Victorian Dorset rolled into one, sometimes uneasily, at other times superbly so. But it is always unmistakably his English." Elliott 1984: 209 rightly sees the resurrection of obsolete words in Hardy as a way to convey the idea of timelessness, of the past merging into the present, of continuity.

<sup>69</sup> However, her occasional use of dialect is described by the narrator as pretty and picturesque (*MC*, Chapter XX, 127).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Chapman 1990: 53: "Whatever the vagaries of his personal belief, Hardy never lost his love of the Bible [...]. He would draw on it for many purposes, and his readers would find nothing alien or strained in biblical references extended beyond the overtly religious context. Characters are displayed with biblical as well as classical and literary analogies. Clym Yeobright 'was a John the

Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text' (RN 171). Henchard visiting the 'conjurer' or white wizard 'felt like Saul at his reception by Samuel' (MC 171)."

<sup>71</sup> Also cf. Ralph Elliott 1993: 34, 121, 126, 135. The same critic, in 1993: 167, considers *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as one of the novels which contains more borrowings, and *The Return of the Native* as one that contains fewer of them.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Chapman 1990: 71-73, and Ralph Elliott 1993: 144, 154-156.

<sup>73</sup> According to Page *ibid.*, the omniscient narrator recurred especially in Hardy's early novels.

<sup>74</sup> Also cf. Hardy's comments on his usage of dialect in Görlach 1999: 211: T34 "*T. Hardy, 'Letter and essay on dialect' (1881-3)*": "The rule of scrupulously preserving the local idiom, together with the words which have no synonym among those in general use, while printing in the ordinary way most of those local expressions which are but a modified articulation of words in use elsewhere, is the rule I usually follow; and it is, I believe, generally recognised as the best, where every such rule must of necessity be a compromise, more or less unsatisfactory to lovers of form."

<sup>75</sup> Also cf. Trudgill 1999: 33 and Map 9 p. 34 on the thirteen Traditional Dialect areas of the English language and also *ibid.*, 44 for its characteristics.

<sup>76</sup> An example of a proverb is "No moon, no man" (RN, Book I, Chapter III, 29).

<sup>77</sup> Specifically, the movement of [i] to [e] giving 'spirit' as *sperrit*, the long vowel [i:] becomes a diphthong, close to [ei] but a little more open, as *craters* for 'creatures'; the back vowel [ɔ:] is opened to [a]; an extra vowel is sometimes inserted in the spelling to show that a long vowel is being given longer duration, as 'tunes' becomes *tuens* and 'cakes' *keakes*, and almost separating into two syllables.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Chapman on vowel sounds, 1990: 114-115, and deviant spellings 115-116.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Ralph Elliott 1993: 92-99, 101-102.

<sup>80</sup> Among words of wider dialectal currency, particularly in the north, west, and south-west of England we find: *fay* = to succeed (MC, Chapter XX, 127; Ralph Elliott 43), *hatch* = gate or sluice, (RN, Book V, Chapter IX, 360; Ralph Elliott 43). (ii) words of restricted dialectal currency, mainly occurring in Hardy's Wessex: *stunpoll* = a stupid fellow, a dunce (MC, Chapter XVI, 104; RN, Book II, Chapter IV, 127; Ralph Elliott 71); (iii) words principally confined to Dorset: *maul down* = to lift down, to grab, in (RN, Book VI, Chapter IV, 390; Ralph Elliott 80); *twanking* = complaining (MC, Chapter XIII, 83; Ralph Elliott 83); (iv) phrases and dialectal corruptions which Hardy uses to add further dialectal verisimilitude: "*chips in porridge*", which occurs in *The Return of the Native*, when Wildeve tells Christian Cantle: "Poor chips-in-porridge, you are very unmannerly." (RN, Book III, Chapter VII, 225), or "*to go snacks with*" = to share, to get married, in MC, Chapter XXXVII, 264: "'Tis wonderful how he could get a lady of her quality to go snacks wi' en in such quick time." On "*chips in porridge*", Ralph Elliott 1993: 88 says: "The proverbial 'chip in porridge' is a thing of no importance or a harmless, useless person, and as 'pottage' or 'broth' are also found in place of 'porridge', there is presumably nothing very 'questionable' about a 'chip' (of whatever consistency) being occasionally found therein." Regarding "*to go snacks with*", Ralph Elliott 1993: 89 explains: "The word *snack* meaning 'a share, portion' occurs in literary English from the seventeenth century, as does the phrase 'to go snacks' in the sense 'to have a share in something, to divide the profits'. Hardy's matrimonial connotations belong to dialect."

<sup>81</sup> A similar view is shared by Chapman 1990: 26.

## Chapter V: Regionalism in D. H. Lawrence

Since I left the valley of home I  
have not much feared any other  
loss. The hills of Nethermere had  
been my walls, and the sky of  
Nethermere my roof overhead.  
(*WP*, Part Three, Chapter III, 287)

### V.1 David Herbert Lawrence: his life, works, and ideology

David Herbert Lawrence was born in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, in 1885. After studying at Nottingham High School and Nottingham University, where he qualified as a pupil-teacher, Lawrence taught in Croydon from 1908 to 1911, although by this time he had already started writing poetry. His first novel, *The White Peacock*, which was published by Heinemann in 1911, offers a realistic portrayal of the country life of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire so familiar to the writer. Lawrence abandoned teaching because of ill health, and started travelling in Europe (Germany and Italy) with Frieda von Richthofen, whom he married in 1914. In his next novels, *The Trespasser* (1912) and *Sons and Lovers* (1913), the major themes of his works – family life and relationships, sexuality, and frustrated ambition in English provincial life – are introduced and discussed, and were further developed in subsequent works like *The Rainbow* (1915), which deals with social and sexual changes within the Midlands' Brangwens family between 1840 and 1905, and *Women in Love* (1920), which focuses on the difficulty of living in a world infected by alienating forces, like cultural degeneration and war.

During the First World War, Lawrence was in England, but suffered from persecution because of his pacifist views and his wife's German nationality. The couple left England in 1919 and stayed in Italy (in Sicily); they also visited

Sardinia in 1921, as documented in Lawrence's travel book *Sea and Sardinia* (1921). In his works of the 1920s, Lawrence explores the possibility of a new religion based on anti-modernism and male domination – see for example, *Aaron's Rod* (1922) and *Kangaroo* (1923). His speculative side, instead, is widely documented in his critical works like *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) and *Pornography and Obscenity* (1929). In the early 1920s (1922-25), Lawrence lived in New Mexico and Mexico, and wrote *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), on the revival of ancient rites in modern life, and in 1925 he returned to Italy and later to the south of France, where he died from tuberculosis in 1930. Before his death, he had written *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928 in Florence), a novel strongly based on the exploration of free expression of sexuality and passion, and banned by censors. His poetical works include, among others: *Love Poems* (1913); *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923); *Collected Poems* (1928); and *Last Poems* (1932), which deal with Lawrence's belief that society destroys man's cosmic potential and with his own approaching death. Lawrence is also widely appreciated for his short stories, collected in *The Prussian Officer* (1914), *England, My England, and Other Stories* (1922 in the United States, 1924 in England), *The Lady Bird, The Fox*, and *The Captain's Doll* (1923), and for his philosophical posthumous work *Apocalypse* (1931).

Lawrence was an original thinker who condemned the negative effects of contemporary industrial culture on the society of his time. In particular, he denounced the suppression of primordial, primitive instincts in favour of an



excessive development of the intellect and of a 'cerebral consciousness', which eventually are, according to him, the main causes of human unhappiness. In his works, therefore, he promoted a more uninhibited and relaxed attitude towards sexuality, which however caused the shocked reaction of the public and his critics.

Lawrence was also against progress, which he saw as a corrupting influence, and the modernisation and mechanisation of the world in general. He proposed a return to a primitive and natural way of living, which might also be related to his profound interest in the relation between man and Nature. In fact, especially in his poetry (but also in his prose), Lawrence presents a kind of Pantheism reminiscent of Romantic poetry and of Wordsworth in particular.

## *V.2 Lawrence as critic of Hardy, Verga, and Deledda*

Lawrence was not only a novelist, poet and playwright, but also an important essayist and critic. As Gordon (1966: 2) maintains, Lawrence's primary interests as a critic were the literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially American, Russian, English, and Italian, and literary theory, in particular the theory of the novel and the relation of art to morality.

Among the numerous authors he discussed, Hardy, Verga, and Deledda are certainly among the most important ones. The *Study of Thomas Hardy (and Other Essays)* (1936 in *Phoenix*)<sup>1</sup> is dedicated to the former. To my knowledge, no personal meeting between Lawrence and Hardy seems to have ever taken place. However, as Millgate (2004: 486) points out, Lawrence was among the poets who contributed, in 1919, to the 'Poets' Tribute', "a handsomely bound volume



containing holograph copies of poems by forty-three poets" (*ibid.*), which was given to Hardy by Siegfried Sassoon in October 1919. According to Millgate (*ibid.*), "Hardy was touched by the gesture and pleased to be honoured in such a fashion, and set himself the not inconsiderable task of thanking personally, and distinctively, each of the poets involved." Although the *Study of Thomas Hardy* is often described as a book more on Lawrence himself than on Hardy,<sup>2</sup> Lawrence's contribution to criticism is fundamental, especially as *The Return of the Native*, *Tess*, and *Jude the Obscure* and characterisation are concerned. The chapters that deal directly with Hardy's work are Chapters III, V and IX.<sup>3</sup>

According to Lawrence, the main factor in the Wessex novels is "the struggle into love and the struggle with love" (*STH* 20). Hardy's characters do unreasonable things. They are explosive, they are people "with a real, vital, potential self" (*STH* 20), and they confront the manners, the conventions, and the commonplace opinions of the time and act independently and absurdly. From this behaviour, the tragedy usually develops (*STH* 20). More importantly, Hardy's Wessex novels portray the struggle of the individuals against the community, and whoever puts their personal needs before those of the community is destined to unhappiness and death (*STH* 21). The conflict between individual desires and needs and the expectations and conventions of the family and the community is actually also a recurrent theme in Lawrence's works.<sup>4</sup> It can be found for example in *Sons and Lovers*, and this is probably why Lawrence considered its discussion important. Thus, as Langbaum also explains, "In the *Study of Hardy*, Lawrence rewrites Hardy's novels and criticizes his deficiencies in such a way as to arrive at

his own novels by an unbroken continuum" (1985: 90). Moreover, as Sanders (1973: 210) points out, in Lawrence's novels the narrator does not speak on behalf of the community, as in Hardy's works, but against it.

As far as *The Return of the Native* is concerned, Lawrence discusses the characters, in particular Eustacia, who he sees as wild and passionate and aiming at self-realisation (*STH* 23), and Clym, the 'educator' of the Egdon Heath community out of cowardice (*STH* 24).<sup>5</sup> In Lawrence's view: "Eustacia because she moves outside the convention, must die, Clym because he identified himself with the community, is transferred from Paris to preaching" (*STH* 24). Moreover, Thomasin and Diggory Venn are seen as genuine people, and Mrs Yeobright represents "the crashing down of one of the old, rigid pillars of the system" (*STH* 24). The exceptional people are destined to death, and only the ordinary, steady and genuine ones remain (*STH* 24).

Lawrence also believes that the real protagonist of the book is the setting, a fundamental element in regional fiction, and in particular the Heath, the archetype of 'primal earth':

The real sense of tragedy is got from the setting. What is the great, tragic power in the book? – it is Egdon Heath. And who are the real spirits of the Heath? – first Eustacia, then Clym's mother, then Wildeve. The natives have little or nothing in common with the place. What is the real stuff of tragedy in the book? It is the Heath. It is the primitive, primal earth, where the instinctive life heaves up. There, in the deep, rude stirring of the instincts, there was the reality that worked the tragedy. (*STH* 25)

However, Lawrence's comment on the native inhabitants of Egdon Heath is, in my opinion, partly inaccurate. In fact, as shown in the previous chapter of this

thesis, the natives of the region, the furze-cutters, are those more at ease with the heath, in terms of their profession and their belonging to the local society. Eustacia, Clym, and Wildeve, who are nevertheless the protagonists of the novel, are not integrated into the local community, and suffer from their dislocation and unrealistic dreams. Lawrence, however, seems to recognise the role of these people when he explains that Clym should also have been educated by the Egdon inhabitants, as they had more experience and knowledge of the place than he did (*STH* 27).<sup>6</sup>

In Chapter V, Lawrence discusses the characters of most of Hardy's novels: Eustacia and Lucetta are seen as examples of "the dark, passionate, arrogant lady" (*STH* 46), while the Mayor of Casterbridge is a "dark, passionate, arrogant man" (*STH* 46). These and many others are, according to Lawrence, Hardy's 'aristocrat-characters' or individualists, which Lawrence privileges also in his works, and describes in the following terms:

By individualist is meant [...] a man of distinct being, who must act in his own particular way to fulfil his own individual nature. He is a man who, being beyond the average, chooses to rule his own life to his own completion, and as such is an aristocrat. The artist always has a predilection for him. But Hardy, like Tolstoi, is forced in the issue always to stand with the community in condemnation of the aristocrat [...]. To do this, however, he must go against himself. His private sympathy is always with the individual, against the community: as is the case with every artist. (*STH* 49)

Lawrence thus classifies Henchard as a "physical individualist" (*STH* 49) who is among the:

passionate, aristocratic males, who fell before the weight of the average, the lawful crowd, but who, in more primitive times, would have formed romantic rather than tragic figures. Of women in the same class are [...] Eustacia, Lucetta [...]. (*STH* 48)

Among the examples of the “bourgeois or average hero, whose purpose is to live and have his being in the community” (*STH* 48), we find Clym, who is unsuccessful and an example of the “physical individualist and spiritual bourgeois or communist” (*STH* 49). Amidst the “companion women to these men” (*STH* 49) we find Thomasin and Elizabeth-Jane.<sup>7</sup>

As we shall see in this chapter, despite Lawrence’s fluctuating admiration for the Wessex novelist,<sup>8</sup> Hardy’s influence on Lawrence has been enormous, especially in the portrayal of the characters and their relation to Nature and their environment, and in the theme of the isolation of the individual within his community and (I would add) family. However, in spite of these ‘thematic’ similarities between the two authors, it is worth remembering the temporal difference between them, and especially the fact that Hardy, despite his modern views of society and relationships, was still a late Victorian author, while Lawrence could be placed among the modernists. In this respect, it could be argued that Hardy’s regionalism evolves into Lawrence’s cosmopolitanism. The limits of the native region, which were still applicable and acceptable in professional and personal terms for many of Hardy’s characters, have become insufficient for Lawrence’s, as for the author himself: these limits have to be implemented by what lies outside the region. In fact, the concept of the *region* has become even more ‘problematic’ in the early twentieth century: in their works, authors who, like D. H. Lawrence, had travelled, made their characters initially (when young) belong to and at ease with their native region, while as adults they

become attracted by the outside world, as occurs in both *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers*.

D. H. Lawrence's comments and reflections on Deledda and her works are presented in his Preface to the English translation of her novel *La madre*, a copy of which can be found in D. H. Lawrence, "*The Mother*, by Grazia Deledda", in *Selected Literary Criticism* (291-295).

In this essay, Lawrence shows his appreciation of the Sardinian novelist and her works,<sup>9</sup> and as previously mentioned, also associates her with Thomas Hardy and Emily Brontë, especially in terms of their respective relations with their native places: Hardy's Dorset and fictional Wessex, Deledda's central-northern Sardinia, and Brontë's famous location of "Wuthering Heights" in her native Yorkshire. Lawrence says that: "Sardinia is by no means a land for Romeos and Juliets, not even Virgins of the Rocks. It is rather the land of *Wuthering Heights*" (*SLC* 294). Lawrence also emphasises Deledda's love for Sardinia and for its isolated populace.<sup>10</sup>

Lawrence also compares Deledda with Verga in the same essay, stating that, even though

Grazia Deledda is not masterly as Giovanni Verga is, yet, in Italian at least, she can put us into the mood and rhythm of Sardinia, like a true artist, an artist whose work is sound and enduring. (*SLC* 295)

Lawrence's relationship with Verga's native island of Sicily, where Frieda and he lived, and his knowledge of Italian literature are also important in his criticism of Verga. In fact, not only did Lawrence translate Verga's *Mastro-don*



*Gesualdo* (1925) and his short stories collection *Novelle Rusticane* (1883) as *Little novels of Sicily* (1925), but he also discussed Verga's works *Cavalleria rusticana ed altre novelle*, which he also translated, and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* in *Selected Literary Criticism*.<sup>11</sup> His admiration for the Sicilian writer is often to be found in his letters: he defines him as the "only Italian who does interest me",<sup>12</sup> and "extraordinarily good".<sup>13</sup>

In his essay on *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, Lawrence offers some background information on the Sicilian author, which is sometimes incorrect, and discusses the meagre reputation enjoyed by Verga, and before him Manzoni, among the European public, essentially because his stories are "too depressing" (SLC 271).

Lawrence considers *I Malavoglia* a 'dated' novel, in which too much emphasis is placed on the tragedy of humble people and on pity (SLC 273). *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, on the other hand, does not deal with poverty, but focuses on the rise and fall of a hero, "an ordinary man with extraordinary energy" (SLC 275). Gesualdo is a soulless Sicilian, who has inherited the passion for wealth, the lack of scruples and the astuteness of the Greeks (SLC 277). Lawrence also describes the setting of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* in south-eastern Sicily as medieval, and the living conditions of the local peasants, who were serfs of the landowners, as poor (SLC 277-279), and therefore not very different from those of the Sardinian countrymen.

In "*Cavalleria rusticana*, by Giovanni Verga", Lawrence maintains that humble people are the subjects of the collection, as in *I Malavoglia*, and that

“Verga by no means exalts the peasants as a class: nor does he believe in their poverty and humility” (*SLC* 287): in fact, he sees them more as sensitive and simple individuals. Verga’s attitude is therefore similar to Lawrence’s, who also privileged the *individuality* of his characters over their belonging to a specific social class.

Moreover, Lawrence considers the short stories of *Cavalleria Rusticana* (*Vita dei Campi*) “the most up to date of stories” (*SLC* 288). However, he criticises what he calls Verga’s “self-effacement in art” (*SLC* 288), which, as any form of emotional self-consciousness, “hinders a first-rate artist” (*SLC* 289), and especially Verga’s theories, which were borrowed by the French. Nevertheless, it is certain that Lawrence appreciated Verga’s work – especially the originality and concise immediacy of his language, and his unsophisticated and primitive characters, which, as Chomel states, are also to be found in Lawrence’s oeuvre.<sup>14</sup> Otherwise, he would not have embarked on the translations and discussion of Verga’s works.

Lawrence visited Sardinia with his wife Frieda in January 1921 for nine days. The couple were living in Taormina at the time, and Lawrence wanted to visit a place less touched by civilisation:

Sardinia, which is like nowhere. Sardinia, which has no history, no date, no race, no offering. Let it be Sardinia. They say neither Romans nor Phoenicians, Greeks nor Arabs ever subdued Sardinia. It lies outside; outside the circuit of civilisation [...]. Sure enough, it is Italian now, with its railways and its motor-omnibuses. But there is an uncaptured Sardinia still. (SS 9)

Their short stay in Sardinia is the subject of Lawrence's travel book *Sea and Sardinia* (1921). Lawrence and his wife were often positively surprised by the generosity and hospitality of the local people they met (SS 126), and especially fascinated by the beauty of the landscapes,<sup>15</sup> which Lawrence sometimes compared to those of Cornwall and of his native Derbyshire region (SS 71 on Cornwall and 81 on both). The rare human figures he sees in the countryside from the train and coaches during his journey also remind the reader of Hardy's solitary furze-cutters of *The Return of the Native*, as the following passage shows: "Among the low, moor-like hills, away in a hollow of the wide landscape one solitary figure, small but vivid black-and-white, working alone, as if eternally" (SS 71).

On his way to Sorgono, in central Sardinia, Lawrence also sees the island as a self-centred, old medieval land, and wonders whether it will ever succumb to enlightenment and world-unity (SS 88). Sorgono, in fact, reminded Lawrence of Hardy's country (SS 92).

The couple also enjoyed Cagliari, the beautiful and variegated female costumes of central Sardinia, and even the lack of touristic attractions in Nuoro, the town where Grazia Deledda was born. As a matter of fact, Lawrence only mentions her twice: "I am thinking that this is the home of Grazia Deledda, the novelist," (SS 131), and while on the way to Terranova, he refers to the landscapes of her books:

The landscape was different from yesterday's. As we dropped down the shallow, winding road from Nuoro, quite quickly the moors seemed to spread on either side, treeless, bushy, rocky, desert. How hot they must be in the summer! One knows from Grazia Deledda's books. (SS 143-144)

This comment, together with his “Preface” to the English translation of Deledda’s novel *La madre*, demonstrate Lawrence’s familiarity with Deledda’s works, and also his tendency to compare her Sardinian landscapes with British ones, (Cornwall, the West-Country, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Ireland), as if he saw landscapes and settings in regional terms. Moreover, Lawrence also compared Sardinians with Sicilians.<sup>16</sup> Sardinian landscapes are also seen as very different from other Italian ones, less romantic and dramatic, but freer (SS 72). Finally, Lawrence also comments on the ignorance of native Sardinians, their lack of socialist views and negotiating skills, their limited desire to work their own land or to invest in it, and their frequent emigration abroad (SS 109-110).

Despite the accurate descriptions of the Sardinian environment and people encountered during the Lawrences’ journey, *Sea and Sardinia* is not merely a travel book that analyses Sardinia and ‘the spirit of the place’, but also a self-exploratory text that offers various and interesting insights on Lawrence and on his perception of people and of the social and political issues of the time.

### V.3 The White Peacock *and* Sons and Lovers: *plots and themes*

Lawrence’s first novel was published by Heinemann in 1911, but its gestation took over four years (three drafts), and was rewritten twice. It is set mainly in the rural and mining area of the Nethermere valley, in Lawrence’s Nottinghamshire; it also includes passages set in Nottingham and London. It presents the story of two families, the middle-class Beardsalls and the farming Saxtons, and in particular that of Cyril (a painter) and Lettie Beardsall and George and Emily Saxton,

neighbours and good friends since childhood. Lettie's flirtation with George is inconclusive and she eventually marries Leslie, the owner of the local mines, who can offer her a much more promising and prestigious future, and with whom she is socially equal. George, distraught by the loss of her, marries his cousin Meg, becomes a prosperous merchant and entrepreneur in horse dealing, but soon falls victim to alcoholism. He becomes violent with his wife and children, and is forced to live with his sister Emily who has married in the meantime, but he soon dies.

The title of the novel symbolises female vanity, and refers to the aristocratic first wife of Mr Annable, the local gamekeeper, and possibly also to Lettie. According to Bradshaw (*WP*: Introduction xxx), this novel was on the whole well received.

As Niven points out, the central themes of the novel are the choices human beings face when they accept the responsibility of maturity, and especially whether we choose to be ourselves or to do what is expected from us by society. The novel also focuses on Lawrence's country of his heart, the Eastwood area in Nottinghamshire, on the passing of the seasons, and on the relation between man and Nature (Niven 1978: 10-11).

Lawrence began *Sons and Lovers* in 1911,<sup>17</sup> and rewrote it four times: there were four drafts, the last of which was completed while Lawrence was already living in Germany with Frieda.<sup>18</sup> It is primarily set in the mining village of Bestwood, the fictionalised Eastwood on the border between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and also in Nottingham.



Sanders summarises the plot of the novel in the following terms:

a child grows to young manhood within the context of family life, in organic relation to a richly evoked community; his personal relationships and his psychological development are inextricably woven out of that common life, even when he is in conscious opposition to his surroundings. (1973: 211)

And also: “Paul grows up, goes to work in Nottingham, has two love affairs, loses his mother and one brother to death” (Sanders 1973: 27). Sanders also sees “The sentimental education of a working-class boy, the lives of a mining family, a farming family and a suffragette” (1973: 58) as the main subjects of the novel.

Booth describes *Sons and Lovers* as “an intense study of family, class and early sexual relationships”, based on Lawrence’s own experiences (*SL*: “Introduction”, ix), and Cancogni (1997: viii) sees love (as life impulse) as the main theme of *Sons and Lovers*.

The novel thus offers a powerful portrait of the colliers’ lifestyle but also of those who choose other careers, like William and Paul Morel. The main themes are love and familial relationships, country versus city, and the diffusion of mechanisation and industrialism in early twentieth-century England. The ‘regional’ aspects seem, in my opinion, to have a slightly less influential role than the relationships between relatives (sons and mother) and lovers. However, Black, who also sees love and marriage as Lawrence’s central themes of *Sons and Lovers* (1986: 77), claims instead that class and the regional setting play an important role in this novel (1986: 151).

#### V.4 *The fictional sub-genres of The White Peacock and Sons and Lovers*

As in the case of Hardy and Deledda, diverging critical opinions have also emerged on Lawrence and his belonging to a specific literary movement or preference for a certain literary genre. In particular, he has been defined as a realist, a tragic writer, a symbolist, and a modernist. In Hough's words, Lawrence

does not fit easily into any of the great tributary streams of contemporary European letters; he is not a naturalist, and he does not claim with much conviction his share in the heritage of symbolism. But he certainly does not belong either with his nearest English contemporaries, altogether more local and restricted – Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster – nor with his immediate seniors – Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells. (1956: 3)

Pinkney (1990: 3) sees Lawrence's works as examples of modernist novels, (in which, however, elements from classicism still appear). However, he also discusses the idea of Englishness not only as the leitmotif of Lawrence's critical reception (1990: 5), but especially as one of the major topics of his first fictional works, in which the same concept is however dismantled (1990: 6-7).<sup>19</sup> The same critic sees various similarities between *The White Peacock* and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, especially as regards novelistic regionalism.<sup>20</sup>

However, the focus of the criticism on Lawrence is to be found especially on the influence of the author's life events on his literary production. In fact, autobiographical elements are, according to the majority of Lawrence's critics,<sup>21</sup> to be detected in both *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers*. Nardi (1970: 15), for example, in his Introduction to the Italian translation of *The White Peacock*, considers Lawrence's first three novels (*The White Peacock*, *The Trespasser*, and *Sons and Lovers*) mainly autobiographical works. He also discusses, as others

do,<sup>22</sup> George Eliot's influence on Lawrence's structure of the novel, specifically the analysis of the relationships between two couples (Nardi 1970: 16).

Pinkney suggests that Lawrence's first novel defends the idea of Englishness, of localism, against the idea of Britishness. The young Beardsalls and Saxtons belong to the valley of Nethermere, while Lettie's middle-class fiancé Leslie represents Britishness. Even George's surname *Saxton* (possibly from *Saxon*) and the origins of the word 'Nethermere' from Old English carry English connotations (Pinkney 1990: 13-14).<sup>23</sup> However, as I will try to demonstrate in this chapter, only some of the Saxtons do appear to be properly 'English' – and thus 'regional' – in their faithfulness to the Nethermere valley and its economy: the Beardsalls are more 'British' for their aspirations and background.

Moreover, for Pinkney, Lawrence's first novel can also be seen as an example of the 'English novel', which "would hew close to the contours of a lovingly observed landscape, depicting the humble lives of the local communities within it, seeing (in Wordsworthian parlance) the life in common things" (1990: 7).

Black (1992: 108) sees Lawrence's first novels as tragedies, and the following ones as open-ended novels, which also contain a tragic underlying feeling. Alcorn, who analyses Lawrence's first and third novels and their indebtedness to Hardy, in particular for the representation of the relation between character and landscape, also sees them as examples of "naturalist novels" (1977: 64). Holderness discusses the influence of realism and Aestheticism and the

struggle between them in the early phase of Lawrence's literary production, and sees Lawrence's realism as always tragic.<sup>24</sup> In particular, like Michelucci, he believes that *The White Peacock* is strongly influenced by Aestheticism, and that it is the only way of evading tragedy at the end of the novel (1982: 115).<sup>25</sup>

It is true that, as often happens with first novels, some autobiographical elements are to be found in Lawrence's *The White Peacock*, which the author himself saw as a "novel of sentiment", and which critics would refer to as an "erotic novel", as he briefly mentions in one of his letters.<sup>26</sup> However, in my opinion, this novel seems to combine different sub-genres: the similar ones of the *Bildungsroman*, *Künstlerroman* (for the study of Cyril's artistic formation), and the autobiographical novel combined with the pastoral and regional novel.

In particular, as regards the pastoral novel, the last chapter of Part Two of the novel is entitled "Pastorals and Peonies", and is therefore a clear reference to the pastoral genre, thus highlighting Lawrence's experiments with tradition and his ultimate desire for innovation that will appear in later works.<sup>27</sup> Lawrence, in fact, in *The White Peacock* combines his rustic characters – that is, the Saxtons – with the middle-class and wealthy ones – that is, Leslie's friends and also Cyril and Lettie – at an afternoon picnic at Strelley Mill (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter IX, 253-261). The references to Theocritus and his pastoral characters (Daphnis, Amaryllis, and Nais) are frequent, and the genre is ridiculed by means of its imitation by some of Leslie's friends (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter IX, 254), and also by considering George a *character* suitable for the genre, instead of a hard-working farmer (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter IX, 256). Thus, as also Bradshaw (*WP* x-

xi) rightly claims, this novel somehow manages to ridicule the pastoral genre and tradition, and functions as Lawrence's first attempt to overcome it.<sup>28</sup> George's irony and contempt of those people are shown at the end of the chapter in a conversation with Cyril (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter IX, 261). The differences in class might also be designed to carry out a mild criticism of society, a theme also developed in George's adherence to socialism, and possibly to the sub-genre of the sociological/thesis novel.

Finally, for Ebbatson, *The White Peacock* was initially conceived as "as a regional novel of manners", but later became a more universal work, which also outlined Lawrence's change of fidelity and indebtedness "from the world of George Eliot to that of Jefferies and Hardy" (1980: 47).

Autobiographical influences are also to be found in *Sons and Lovers*, especially as regards the social and economic background of the Morels, and the contrast within the family, all based on the Lawrences' everyday life.<sup>29</sup> In fact, as Draper (1969: 2) maintains: "For Lawrence art and life are inseparable – both life in general, and also his own particular life, which he drew upon extensively for the material of his fiction."

Slade also sees *Sons and Lovers* as an autobiographical work, in which Lawrence actually wrote on the life he knew, and which was also written for the author's psychological well-being (1969: 39).

Apart from the autobiographical elements that Lawrence's third novel contains, various critics prefer other interpretations. Modiano defines *Sons and*



*Lovers* as Lawrence's *Bildungsroman* (1987: 76),<sup>30</sup> and Gordon sees in it both tragic and countertragic elements (1966: 86). Michelucci considers it the novel in which Lawrence passes from a Romantic and Aesthetic style to a modernist one, in which Lawrence's emancipation from the themes and problems of his youth is evident (2002: 32).

Pinkney regards *Sons and Lovers* as a realist novel that raises once more the issues of classicism, Englishness and modernism (1990: 27). However, he also sees this novel as an example of a *Künstlerroman* comparable to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and even as the first example of an Imagist novel (1990: 32 and 42 respectively). As a matter of fact, Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) can also be considered, like *Sons and Lovers*, as a *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* in which the regionalistic elements – for example the Dublin setting – are particularly important.

Finally, Hough maintains that *Sons and Lovers* is the first Freudian novel written in English, a work in which Freudianism was acquired through the influence of Lawrence's German wife, Frieda (1956: 40). However, as other critics argue, this cannot be possible: Lawrence had not read Freud at the time of writing *Sons and Lovers*, as the same author maintains.<sup>31</sup> Eagleton, for example, rightly points out that while he was writing *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence probably had some knowledge of Freud's work from his wife, but almost certainly he had not read Freud's works. Nevertheless, in Eagleton's opinion, *Sons and Lovers* is a profoundly oedipal novel (1992: 62).

In my opinion, it can be argued that this novel mainly combines the fictional genres of the *Bildungsroman* – in which the exploration of the characters' emotional and psychological life is fundamental – with those of the realist and regional novel. A minor influence of the *Künstlerroman* can be found if the focus is put on Paul's formation as an artist. As we shall see later in this chapter, the realism of the novel constantly surfaces in the representation of the mining town and in that of the industrial work in Nottingham. Its regionalism is conveyed by the focus of the most important events on a specific mining community in the Midlands, which obviously might be similar to other English mining communities, but nevertheless had its own peculiarities and characteristics, and on the nearby industrial town of Nottingham. The purpose of the rest of this chapter is to demonstrate this hypothesis.

#### *V.5 The historical and social background of the novels: Lawrence, Industrialism, and the Midlands*

As Fforde maintains (1994: 25), Great Britain experienced a strong economic development in the nineteenth century, in particular between 1783 and 1870. As already illustrated in chapter IV, between 1820 and 1870 agriculture underwent a rapid decrease in favour of other sectors, and as Fforde explains (1994: 25-27), especially of the mining and textile industries, and of manufacturing production. This process was also accompanied by the diffusion of the railway system. Between 1870 and 1930, however, Britain lost its primary role as the leading economic power to become merely one of the industrialised nations. From 1870 to

1918, the sectors that contributed to the technological maturity of the country were especially the production of steel, electricity, and chemical products, while the role of agriculture became less and less relevant (Fforde 1994: 141-143). Agriculture experienced a change from granary production to cattle farming and shepherding, to which it adapted itself positively (Fforde 1994: 144-145). This process is witnessed in *The White Peacock*, in which the Saxtons are forced to emigrate, while George, who chooses to maintain part of his family farming production, dedicates part of his business to cattle farming, giving up the granary production.

According to Holderness, agriculture and mining were originally strictly connected in the East Midlands as well as in the rest of England:

Originally in Nottinghamshire, as everywhere in England, coal-mining operations were a natural extension of agricultural production and cultivation of the land, coal being another 'crop' necessary for domestic consumption. Landholders regarded coal-mining as a specialised branch of farming, and originally agricultural labourers mined coal as part-time employment when work in the fields was slack. (1982: 48)

This is also confirmed by Beal (1961: 1-2). Gradually, the landowners took charge of the capital investment in the mining sector, and in the eighteenth century the area saw the rise of a capitalist firm, Barber & Fletcher (later Barber-Walker & Co.), whose owners were yeomen and small landholders. Before 1840, mining was organised according to the 'butty system', in which the workers were subordinated to a contractor, the butty, who agreed with the owner of the mine to deliver the coal at a certain price per weight. The butty also provided the capital, hired the labourers, used his own horses, and supplied the tools necessary for the job.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, according to Modiano, the miners, under the *butty* system, enjoyed “a sort of intimate community” in the underground, which was disrupted by the introduction of technological developments: production became impersonal, and urbanisation detached mankind from Nature and from natural instincts (1987: 21). Modiano also mentions the better economic conditions of the miners in Nottinghamshire compared to those of other lesser paid industrial workers in the area, and of colliers in other parts of Britain (1987: 17-18).

Thus, it can be argued, in Modiano’s words (1987: 29-30), that from a society based on agriculture, lace trade, framework-knitting trade, and coal production before 1850, Eastwood, by 1885, experienced enormous changes because of the decline of these industries, with the exception of coal mining. Agriculture suffered because of cheap grain imported from America, and farm labour also diminished because of mechanisation. The Eastwood society became part of the industrial society, even though it was not based on iron and steel production, or on manufacturing and large scale distribution of goods. The main occupation was coal mining, which was affected by the opening of the canals in the Erewash Valley at the end of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. The opening of the Main-Line Railroad in 1848 also improved transportation and the accessibility of the markets in the South, which led to an increase in coal production. The improvement and enlargement of the mines followed.<sup>33</sup>

Modiano also argues that, even though Eastwood had become industrialised with the advent and growth of the coal-mining industry, the local community

maintained a close association with the pastoral and agricultural aspects of life in the area, because mining was the only industry established in the region (1987: 40).

Finally, according to Holderness, during Lawrence's childhood and early youth, the miners of his native area experienced a balance between capital and labour, and the establishment of the first permanent miners' union (1982: 59). Holderness also affirms that the society of Eastwood was "a temporary alliance of mutually antagonistic forces" (1982: 66), and not an organic community as for example Richard Aldington, Lawrence's friend and biographer, believed.<sup>34</sup>

As regards *The White Peacock*, Lawrence provides the social and economic background to the setting at the beginning of Chapter VI, Part One:

Strelley Mill lies at the north end of the long Nethermere valley. On the northern slopes lay its pasture and arable lands [...]. From the eastern hill crest, looking straight across, you could see the spire of Selsby Church, and a few roofs, and the head-stocks of the pit [...]. Now the squire of the estate, head of an ancient, once even famous, but now decayed house, loved his rabbits [...]? An evil fortune discovered to him that he could sell each of his rabbits [...]; since which time the noble family subsisted by rabbits. Farms were gnawed away; corn and sweet grass departed from the face of the hills; cattle grew lean, unable to eat the defiled herbage [...]. Meanwhile, Strelley Mill began to suffer under this gangrene. (*WP* 67-68)

This passage shows something already discussed in chapter IV of this thesis in relation to the social background of Hardy's novels, and the organisation of the land property in Britain in the late nineteenth century. In *The White Peacock* the land also belongs to the aristocracy, and tenant farmers are subject to the owners' will. Therefore, in the course of the novel, the former are forced to leave their



local place and jobs in agriculture and cow-farming – or to limit the latter to a smaller number of animals – to look for better opportunities elsewhere.

In fact, the decline of agriculture and the eviction from his farm make Mr Saxton keen on going to Canada and settling down there with his wife and younger children. He has become a radical and has improved his knowledge of “the land question” (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter IV, 207). Political activism is thus also presented in the novel. In fact, after his marriage with Meg, George’s commitment to socialist issues is strong (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter VI, 326), but he soon gets tired of them. On the other hand, Leslie becomes a county counsellor and also politically engaged with the Conservative Party, thus defending the rights of the wealthy class.

In relation to the role played by mining and industry in this novel, Holderness maintains that Lawrence, in *The White Peacock*, “presents a Derbyshire without industry” (1982: 96), and transforms the society he wishes to portray as “an almost feudal community” (*ibid.*). This, however, is not true. In fact, even though mining, in this novel, generally does not have a central role as it does in Lawrence’s third novel, Lawrence gives some space, even if a minor one, to the miners and their protest, and shows the solidarity of the local community towards their requests. The pits also often occur in the landscape descriptions as an impending force that might overcome agriculture and farming, which are described as decaying. For instance, Part Two begins with the reference to a miners’ strike:

The men in the mines of Tempest, Warrall and Co. came out on strike on a question of the re-arranging of the working system down below. The distress was not awful, for the men were on the whole wise and well-conditioned, but there was a dejection over the face of the country-side, and some suffered keenly. (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter I, 141)

And later: "The strike was over. The men had compromised. It was a gentle way of telling them they were beaten" (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter I, 142-143). In these passages, Lawrence, by means of his narrator Cyril, introduces the reader to the working and economic conditions of the Midlands miners. The social and economic theme, however, is developed inaccurately, as also happens in Verga's, Deledda's, and Hardy's novels. It mainly aims at showing the solidarity within the local community, and possibly at highlighting Lettie's democratic ideas. The end of the strike is felt like liberation, though the emphasis is on its failure, and on that of the miners. In the clash between the workers and the owners, represented by Leslie Tempest, it is the latter who win.

Thus, it can be assumed that the background of this novel is one of transition between the old rural England and the modern, industrial one. However, as Bradshaw declares: "Lawrence suggests that the valley's decline is less a by-product of the mining industry than of reckless agricultural practices and a devastating failure of social obligation" (*WP* xvi).

As regards *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence offers an accurate description of the historical and social background of Bestwood, his native Eastwood, and of the evolution of mining in the region during the two last decades of the nineteenth century and the first one of the twentieth century (late 1880s-1910s ca.) at the

very beginning of the novel. Holderness (1982: 26), in relation to this, maintains that the Midlands' mining society described in *Sons and Lovers* is that of Lawrence's early youth, especially the 1890s, while others claim that it is that of the first decade of 1900. It is more probable that, since the novel initially includes references to the first meeting of Mr and Mrs Morel, and also to an imminent war against the Germans (World War I), and ends when Paul is in his mid-twenties, its temporal span is contained between the 1880s and the first decade of 1900.

At the beginning of the novel, Lawrence discusses the first primitive instalments of collieries (the gin-pits) in his agricultural native area, and their subsequent substitution by larger mines around 1850. As he says,

The coal and iron field of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire was discovered. Carston, Waite and Co. appeared. Amid tremendous excitement, Lord Palmerston formally opened the company's first mine at Spinney Park, on the edge of Sherwood Forest. (*SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 3)

Gradually, more mines were sunk, and the railway line spread.

Draper clearly discusses these dual, combining aspects of the society of Eastwood, agriculture and industrialism, and consequently the beauty of the local countryside which is ruined by the ugliness of industrialism (1969: 2-3). In fact, in *Sons and Lovers*, the mining community of Eastwood is linked to the agricultural world of the Leivers' farm and to the industrialism of Nottingham. The first two worlds seem to coexist peacefully, and the management of the farm is demanding as well as the miners' work, while Paul's factory job in Nottingham does not appear as strenuous as in the other two cases.

Therefore, it can be maintained that Eastwood is portrayed by Lawrence in the fictional Bestwood as a predominantly working-class society, repressed and

controlled by the landowners, industrial magnates, and politicians (Sanders 1973: 214). Its members often struggle to make ends meet, because of accidents in the pit or of the reduction of productivity. The few representatives of the bourgeoisie who appear in the novel (for example, originally Mrs Morel, and her friend the clergyman) emerge as partly isolated from the rest of the community.<sup>35</sup> In particular, the class contrast between Mr and Mrs Morel is highlighted throughout the novel.

Finally, the limitation and restriction of the working opportunities offered by the area are evident. In fact, for the more educated characters like William, Paul, and also the self-educated Miriam, who all dream of working prospects other than those offered by the pit or the farm, the only solution is to leave Bestwood and move to a town – Nottingham – or a city – London. This is also what happened in *The White Peacock* in the agricultural and pastoral society of the Nethermere valley.

#### *V.6 Setting: landscape and community*

In a letter to H. A. Piehler, a writer of travel books, Lawrence offers invaluable details regarding the setting of his “Nottingham-Derby novels” – and therefore regional ones – which seem worth quoting:

The scene of my Nottingham-Derby novels all centres round Eastwood, Notts (where I was born): and whoever stands on Walker Street, Eastwood, will see the whole landscape of *Sons and Lovers* before him: Underwood in front, the hills of Derbyshire on the left, the woods and hills of Annesley on the right. The road from Nottingham by Watnall, Moorgreen, up to Underwood and on to Annesley (Byron’s Annesley) – gives you all the landscape of *The White Peacock*, Miriam’s farm in *Sons and Lovers*, and the home of the Crich family, and Willey water, in *Women in Love*.<sup>36</sup>



The setting of both *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers* is thus the very familiar area of Lawrence's native Eastwood, close to the border between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. This region, as Lawrence's words imply, played a fundamental role in his works, and continued to do so also when the writer was living abroad. In this sense, he can certainly be compared to Deledda, who continued to choose Sardinia for the setting of her novels even after she had moved to Rome, and also to Verga, who, after he had lived in mainland Italy, seemed to 'discover again' Sicily, or a different, cruder one than the region he had portrayed sketchily in some of his first historical and sentimental works. Hardy, as Gilmour (1989: 65) emphasises, became a regionalist after living and working in London. As the same scholar explains, "perhaps all regional artists must leave their regions – or come to them from elsewhere – before becoming conscious of their calling" (*ibid.*). In fact, it might be argued that the nostalgic feelings for their native place experienced by migrant writers led them to employ this locale in works that would become strongly regional.

As regards *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers*, both novels begin with the presentation of the local setting: in the former, it is the vale of the Nethermere, a small lake, which according to Modiano, corresponds to Moorgreen Reservoir, about a mile north of Eastwood (1987: 51). The initial landscape appears quiescent as in the old times, and as in a pastoral and 'aquatic' idyll:

The whole place was gathered in the musing of old age. The thick-piled trees on the far shore were too dark and sober to dally with the sun; the weeds stood crowded and motionless. Not even a little wind flickered the willows of the islets. The water lay softly, intensely still. (*WP*, Part One, Chapter I, 5)



A more specific description of the setting is given by Cyril later on in the same chapter, where Strelley (Mill), Woodside and Highclose are the key locations and respective homes of the Saxtons, the Beardsalls, and the Tempests:

Nethermere is the lowest in a chain of three ponds. The other two are the upper and lower mill ponds at Strelley: this is the largest and most charming piece of water, a mile long and about a quarter of a mile in width. Our wood runs down to the water's edge. On the opposite side, on a hill beyond the farthest corner of the lake, stands Highclose. It looks across the water at us in Woodside with one eye as it were, while our cottage casts a side-long glance back again at the proud house, and peeps coyly through the trees. (*WP*, Part One, Chapter I, 14)

This description is complemented by the one found at the beginning of Chapter VI, Part One, which also provides the social and economic background of the setting (*WP* 67-68, quoted above).

Nature is a fundamental element in Lawrence's philosophy of life, which in simple terms condemns the advent of modernisation and favours a return to a more primitive and instinctual life closer to Nature. Lawrence's love for the countryside, also emphasised by Chambers (1980: 31, 33-34, 40-41, 110-111), is manifested in his constant references to plants – flowers in particular – and animals – especially birds and insects – in his novels.<sup>37</sup> The novel contains numerous examples of the pathetic fallacy, which is a reminiscence of the Romantic period, and of a 'humanised Nature' as in: "The long-drawn booming of the wind in the wood and the *sobbing* and *moaning* in the maples and oaks near the house, had made Lettie restless" (*WP*, Part One, Chapter II, 16) (emphasis mine). This technique, as we have already seen, is also often employed by Hardy, Verga, and Deledda, and can be identified as one of Lawrence's inheritances from Wordsworth and Hardy.

Another type of landscape is the one that combines images of the pastoral and agricultural countryside with those of the mining areas; Lawrence emphasises the ugliness of the latter as in:

We came in sight of the head-stocks of the pit at Selsby, and of the ugly village standing blank and naked on the brow of the hill [...]. We were all quite gay as we turned off the high road and went along the bridle path, with the woods on our right, the high Strelley hills shutting in our small valley in front, and the fields and the common to the left. (*WP*, Part One, Chapter V, 56)

Later on, the mines, which will have a fundamental role especially in *Sons and Lovers*, appear again to be a form of disturbance of the quietness of Nature, because they are not yet a fundamental feature of the area (*WP*, Part One, Chapter V, 61).

The landscape and the agricultural and pastoral activities related to it sometimes appear idyllic, but the reality, for the Strelley Farm people, is of mere subsistence. With regard to this, the idyllic vision of the English Midlands countryside, and of the farmers' love for the place and their work, is occasionally combined with references to better opportunities abroad, for example in Canada (*WP*, Part One, Chapter VI, 70). The theme of emigration, as the previous chapters of this thesis have shown, is recurrent within the sub-genre of the regional novel, and is often associated with the characters' difficulty in accepting the idea of leaving their beloved native area and community, family and friends. In fact, as Michelucci argues,

Constructing its own site in space, a community creates a microcosm, on the basis of which it is possible to explain and understand the rest of the world and to cohabit in a dialectical relation with it, reinforcing one's own sense of

belonging to one's own place by virtue of consciousness of separation from the external and from other places. (2002: 3)

Efix in Deledda's *Canne al vento*, or Alfio Mosca in Verga's *I Malavoglia*, and the same Mastro-don Gesualdo in the eponymous novel, all hate having to leave their community. Instead, 'Ntoni in *I Malavoglia*, Giacinto in *Canne al vento* and initially Clym in Hardy's *The Return of the Native* are much more positive with regard to emigration.

The idea of leaving the native area is, for the Saxtons, linked to their deteriorating economic conditions, as this passage shows (George is speaking to Cyril):

"[...]. As it is, we depend on the milk-round, and on the carting which I do for the council. You can't call it farming. We're a miserable mixture of farmer, milkman, greengrocer, and carting contractor. It's a shabby business." "You have to live," I retorted. "Yes – but it is rotten. And father won't move – and he won't change his methods." "Well – what about you?" "Me! What should I change for? – I'm comfortable at home. As for my future, it can look after itself, so long as nobody depends on me." (*WP*, Part One, Chapter VI, 71-72)

Here George manifests his disillusionment, but also his appreciation of his current life in the Nethermere area, and his lack of desire to leave it. He seems to favour innovation in farming methods, but he also shows, in the following lines, his anger towards the landowner who protects the rabbits that damage his family's fields. However, later on, despite his love for domestic comfort, George thinks that he should leave the Nethermere valley, because it has become unprofitable (*WP*, Part One, Chapter VI, 75). Up to this point, he can be compared to Clym Yeobright, who, on the contrary, *willingly* leaves Egdon Heath for Paris in search for better prospects, but who later returns disillusioned and keen to settle down in

his native community in order to improve the locals' education. However, George's contradictory attitude also shows that he is tired of the same hard routine and lack of good prospects for the future. As readers, we realise that his idea of emigrating is also related to his partly unrequited love for Lettie, and especially to the fear of losing her forever if she marries Leslie, as she eventually does. Therefore, George is split between the secure – secure also in terms of status and respect – but economically disheartening life in the Nethermere valley, and the challenge of a new life outside it or abroad.

Early in the novel, and precisely in Chapter VII of Part One, the contrast between the country and the city – another convention of regional fiction – is introduced in a dialogue between Leslie and Cyril:

“The town, anywhere's better than this hell of a country.” “Ha! How did you enjoy yourself?” He began a long history of three days in the metropolis. I listened, and heard little. I heard more plainly the cry of some night birds over Nethermere, and the peevish, wailing, yarling cry of some beast in the wood. (*WP* 90)

While Leslie seems already to favour city life over country life, Cyril's comments highlight his reservations about town life, and his focus on the natural environment of the Nethermere valley. Lettie also dreams of leaving her native place, and wants to go and live nearer the town (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter III, 191).

In Chapter I, Part Three, the contrast between the country and the city, in this case Nethermere versus Nottingham, is also illustrated and discussed by the narrator through George's and Meg's perspectives. The chapter is entitled “A new start in life”, and it represents a new beginning for all the protagonists: their final

farewell to youth – with the wedding of Lettie and Leslie, and of George and Meg – and their farewell to their native place:

It was time for us all to go, to leave the valley of Nethermere whose waters and whose woods were distilled in the essence of our veins. We were the children of the valley of Nethermere, a small nation with language and blood of our own, and to cast ourselves each one into separate exile was painful to us. (*WP* 263)

During George, Meg and Cyril's journey to Nottingham, Lawrence describes once again the beauty of their native countryside, with its luminous aspect and colourful floral surroundings:

The *yellow* corn was dipping and flowing in the fields, like a cloth of *gold* pegged down at the corners under which the wind was heaving. Sometimes we passed cottages where the *scarlet lilies* rose like bonfires, and the tall larkspur like *bright blue* leaping smoke [...]. Then we rocked and jolted over the rough cobblestones of Cinderhill, and bounded forward again at the foot of the enormous *pit* hill, *smelling* of *sulphur*, inflamed with *slow red fires* in the daylight, and crusted with *ashes*. We reached the top of the rise and saw the *city* before us, *heaped high and dim* upon the broad range of the hill [...]. *Over the city hung a dullness, a thin dirty canopy against the blue sky*. We turned and swung down the slope between the last *sullied cornfields* towards Basford, where the *swollen gasometers stood like toadstools*. (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter I, 270) (emphasis mine)

However, as the passage shows, as soon as a pit is introduced, and even more so once the city appears in view, the colourfulness of the landscape is substituted by the dimness and dullness of Nottingham, and by the ugliness of the gasometers that pollute the cornfields. Here Lawrence, through his narrator Cyril, is not only condemning the ugliness of the city, but also the negative effects of industrialisation and modernisation on Nature and on human life in general. In fact, this passage is followed by the description of two young children and a baby abandoned crying "to the heedless heavens" (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter I, 270), which also reminds us of Hardy's unsympathetic Nature, thus symbolising the



solitude and lack of communal life in the city. Meg, like a typical countryside person, is uncomfortable in the noisy town (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter I, 272) and George is also frightened by it because it represents the unknown aspects of life (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter I, 273). George, in fact, is afraid of venturing outside his native place, and feels as if he was violating the values in which he has always believed (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter I, 273).

While Lawrence describes Nottingham as a busy city (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter I, 274), London is portrayed not only in its bustling life, but also through the poverty of the inhabitants and beggars of the East-End. Lawrence, through Cyril and George, emphasises this degrading aspect of life in a metropolis, and offers the opportunity to discuss socialist issues. Here follows the contrasting aspects of London through the eyes of the two protagonists:

Closed together in the same blue flames, we discovered and watched the pageant of life in the town revealed wonderfully to us [...]. Were we not in the midst of the bewildering pageant of modern life, with all its confusion of bannerets and colours, with its infinite interweaving of sounds [...]; and between these two the swiftness of songs, the triumphant lilt of the joy of life, the hoarse oboes of privation, the shuddering drums of tragedy, and the eternal scraping of the two deep-toned strings of despair? [...] At the Marble Arch Corner we listened to a little socialist who was flaring fiercely under a plane tree [...]. For him the world was all East-end, and all East-end was as a pool from which the waters are drained off, leaving the water-things to wrestle in the wet mud under the sun, till the whole of the city seems a heaving, shuddering struggle of black-mudded objects deprived of the elements of life [...]. At night, after the theatre, we saw the outcasts sleep in a rank under the Waterloo Bridge, their heads to the wall, their feet lying out on the pavement: a long, black, ruffled heap at the foot of the wall [...]. (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter V, 311-312)

In this passage, Lawrence depicts ironically but also critically the modernity of London, and, with the exception of the socialist, the lack of interest of the busy citizens for the poverty and the difficulties of others. George is moved by the

desolate conditions of the beggars, and after witnessing them he gets involved in politics and in socialism. Moreover, the degrading conditions of the East End people remind the reader of the grim images of Blake's poem "London" (1794): "I wander through each dirty street / Near were the dirty Thames does flow, / And mark in every face I meet / Mark of weakness, / marks of woe".<sup>38</sup>

Eventually, unlike Cyril, who has learned to appreciate the city, George, even after having experienced it, still does not admire it (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter V, 317). His sister Emily, unlike Cyril, Leslie and Lettie, also escapes the modernised but alienating world of the city. As already mentioned, at the end of the novel, only Emily seems to be integrated with the countryside environment she has returned to: "Emily had at last found her place, and had escaped from the torture of strange, complex modern life" (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter VIII, 354).

*Sons and Lovers* is mostly set in Bestwood, that is, Eastwood, a town in the Nottingham area, precisely on the border between Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, some eight miles north-west of Nottingham (Beal 1961: 1). The novel contains references to other places, such as Nottingham, London, and the holiday and excursion destinations of Ilkeston, Alfreton, Mablethorpe, Lincoln, Theddlethorpe, and the Nethermere area.

The novel begins with a precise social and geographical location in Bestwood, "The Bottoms" area, where many colliers live. Lawrence emphasises especially the disheartening and alienating characteristics of the miners' accommodation:

The Bottoms consisted of six blocks of miners' dwellings, two rows of three, like the dots on a blank-six domino, and twelve houses in a block. This double row of dwellings sat at the foot of the rather sharp slope from Bestwood, and looked out, from the attic windows at least, on the slow climb of the valley towards Selby. The houses themselves were substantial and very decent [...]. But that was outside; that was the view on to the uninhabited parlours of all the colliers' wives [...]. So, the actual conditions of living in the Bottoms, that was so well built and that looked so nice, were quite unsavoury because people must live in the kitchen, and the kitchens opened on to that nasty alley of ash-pits. (*SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 4)

As already mentioned in V.4, Lawrence had previously described the rise and evolution of the local mining community at the very beginning of the novel.

Black (1986: 43) says that Bestwood's countryside (described in the first part of *Sons and Lovers*) focuses mainly on the beauty of the landscape and less on the mining-town atmosphere. In my opinion, not much space is given to the description of the town and even less so to the colliery where Mr Morel works. This is in contrast to Lawrence's first novel, in which the emphasis is put on the intrusive and degrading advance of the pits into the idyllic pastoral and agricultural landscape of the Nethermere valley. In *Sons and Lovers*, on the other hand, the mines are already *an integrated part* of the landscape, and therefore their presence is no longer intimidating and hostile for the local inhabitants. Paul, in fact, accepts them as part of his native environment, while his partner Clara does not like the colliery, because it impairs the beauty of the landscape:

They came near to the colliery. It stood quite still and black among the corn-fields, its immense heap of slag seen rising almost from the oats. "What a pity there is a coal-pit here where it is so pretty!" said Clara. "Do you think so?" he answered. "You see, I am so used to it I should miss it. No; and I like the pits here and there. I like the rows of trucks and the headstocks, and the steam in the daytime, and the lights at night [...]" (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter XII, 278)

Moreover, the countryside landscape, as in Lawrence's first novel, is seen in positive terms, as for example in Part One, Chapter VI, when the Leivers are also introduced:

The old brick wall by the Statutes ground burned scarlet, spring was a very flame of green. And the steep swoop of highroad lay, in its cool morning dust, splendid with patterns of sunshine and shadow, perfectly still. (*SL* 107)

In this description, there is a strong focus on the good weather and on the beauty of the countryside. Willey Farm – the Leivers' residence – and its surroundings also resemble a pastoral setting, and emerge as places of tranquillity rather than as places of hard physical work:

Flush with the wood was the apple orchard, where blossom was falling on the grindstone. The pond was deep under a hedge and overhanging oak-trees. Some cows stood in the shade. The farm and buildings, three sides of a quadrangle, embraced the sunshine towards the wood. It was very still. Mother and son went into the small railed garden, where was a scent of red gillivers. By the open door were some floury loaves, put out to cool. A hen was just coming to peck them. (*SL*, Part One, Chapter VI, 109)

As this passage shows, the emphasis of Lawrence's landscape descriptions in this novel is often on trees and flowers, as in *The White Peacock*.

Furthermore, as we shall see in the part of this chapter dedicated to the analysis of the characters, the landscape – including the countryside surrounding Bestwood, Nottingham Castle Park, and the seaside resorts – is often associated with the characters' feelings and emotions.

Moreover, as it often is the case in regional fiction, external places are seen as fascinating and mysterious. In *Sons and Lovers*, this occurs in the case of English cities like Birmingham and Manchester (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter VII, 149), and also London and Scotland: "the little party looked up the lines one way, to



London, and the other way, to Scotland, and they felt the touch of these two magical places” (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter VII, 144).

In this sense, this novel does not tend to highlight the negative aspects of cities, as Lawrence’s first novel often did, but rather the different, occasionally intimidating but also more exciting experiences that places like Nottingham and especially London can offer. This is true, especially for Paul. Therefore, it can be argued that in *Sons and Lovers*, the distance between the naturalness, but also hardness, of country and mining life, and the excitement of the city has been reduced, but not cancelled (as the end of the novel demonstrates), as it occurs instead in Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, where town and country converged in Casterbridge itself – a rural town. Moreover, the concept of the setting in regional fiction seems to have evolved from Hardy’s exclusively rural one to Lawrence’s more industrial one in his third novel, in which rural elements still partially survive (for example in the agro-pastoral environment of Willey Farm).

#### *V.7 The representation of culture*

Not many instances of the representation of local customs and folklore can be found in *The White Peacock*. One minor case is related to the agricultural season, the harvest (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter II, 278), another to the traditional Christmas celebrations. The description of a local fair is offered in Part One, Chapter IV “The Father”, in which Mrs Beardsall and Cyril visit their deceased relative in a nearby village. The happiness of the fair certainly contrasts with the sombre mood



of the two characters. Lawrence does not provide any cultural or historical background to it: it is seen *en passant*:

As we came in sight of the little grey tower of the church, we heard the sound of braying, brassy music. Before us, filling a little croft, the Wakes was in full swing. Some wooden horses careered gaily round, and the swing-boats leaped into the mild blue sky [...]. There were booths, and cocoa-nut shies and roundabouts scattered in the small field. Groups of children moved quietly from attraction to attraction. A deeply tanned man came across the field swinging two dripping buckets of water. Women looked from the doors of their brilliant caravans, and lean dogs rose lazily and settled down again under the steps. (*WP* 41)

A *wake* is an “annual holiday and fair that was celebrated close to the feast day of the saint associated with the local church” (*SL* note 5, 367).<sup>39</sup> The *wakes* represented in *Sons and Lovers* are very similar:

Mrs Morel did not like the wakes. There were two sets of horses, one going by steam, one pulled round by a pony; three organs were grinding, and there came odd cracks of pistol-shots, fearful screeching of the cocoanut man’s rattle, shouts of the Aunt Sally man, screeches from the peepshow lady. (*SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 5)

The fair is mainly seen through Mrs Morel’s eyes, and its description is limited to its essential features. Moreover, unlike Verga’s and Deledda’s representation of religious festivals, no reference is made to the religious aspects of the celebrations, or, in the second example, no emphasis is placed on the socialising effects of the event.

Apart from the ‘pastoral’ picnic in *The White Peacock*, the *wakes*, the Christmas party tradition in both novels, and the excursions during holiday time in *Sons and Lovers*, are the main descriptions of the Midlands customs, which were presumably shared by other British rural and mining areas. Consequently, the question of why Lawrence does not portray the local traditions arises. A hypothesis might be that the author sees them *embedded* in the farming and

mining professions and in socialising among colleagues. Perhaps, in his opinion, the representation of the locale was more effective through the depiction of the landscapes and scenery and of the characters' agricultural and mining professions and related habits. On the other hand, it can be argued that the traditions and folklore of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire had become *limited*, in those days, to the already-mentioned fairs, and perhaps to the celebration of events related to the passing of seasons, as for example that of the harvest in *The White Peacock*.<sup>40</sup>

Another aspect related to the scarcity of folkloristic descriptions in *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers* is the absence of detailed representations of local religious events. This characteristic is probably related to Lawrence's religious views, which evolved in the course of his life. As Poplawski explains, Lawrence rejected Congregationalism, the religion of his childhood, and lost faith in Christianity, but not in "the psychological need for faith" (Poplawski 1993: 43). Lawrence moved from a Christian view focused on humanity and the individual towards a more 'pagan' cosmic view that puts humanity in relation to life on earth and to the cosmos (Poplawski 1993: 49). Lawrence's later religious view could thus be defined as a contrast between Christianity, with its transcendental deism, and a form of immanent pantheism. This refusal of Christianity and the search for an immanent force or form of divine power seems to link Hardy to Lawrence.<sup>41</sup> The same critic (1993: 53) also argues that, by about 1911, Lawrence had already elaborated some metaphysical principles for a new, non-Christian religion; they focus on "a vital life-force operating throughout the universe that gives form, direction, and meaning to all life" (*ibid.*). This force, according to Poplawski, is

illustrated for example in the portrayal of wild Nature in *The White Peacock* (1993: 56-57).

In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul Morel, like Lawrence, seems to move towards Agnosticism and a form of “vitalistic pantheism” (Poplawski 1993: 72).<sup>42</sup> Poplawski (1993: 73) also believes that Lawrence organises the plot of this novel “around the church year of holy days and festivals.” For example, Mr and Mrs Morel meet at a Christmas party; a walk and an excursion are organised around Easter time, on Good Friday and Easter Monday respectively. This seems to a certain extent an overstatement. Religion may still be part of the characters’ lives, especially in the case of Miriam and her mother, and in Paul and Miriam’s conversations on this theme, but the manifestation of religious beliefs certainly does not surface as frequently as it does in Deledda’s and Verga’s works.<sup>43</sup>

### V.8 Characters

According to Draper, Lawrence had an innovative view of characters, and his attention was focused on what a character *was* more than on his/her feelings and qualities. This occurs especially in *The Rainbow* and in *Women in Love*, less frequently in *Sons and Lovers*, which is closer to late-nineteenth-century characterisation (Draper 1969: 29). In *The White Peacock*, and also in *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence initially presents his characters with a physical description, which usually aims at emphasising their beauty, as in Lettie’s case (*WP*; Part One, Chapter I, 13), and also their strength and vigour, as for example in George (*WP*, Part One, Chapter I, 5), whose occasional brutality is also foregrounded.

Cyril, the first-person narrator of *The White Peacock*, and his sister Lettie, are responsible for George's education and the broadening of mind and of expectations that might drive him *outside* his native valley, but which will however condemn him to much unhappiness and unsatisfied desires.<sup>44</sup> Unlike their friend, they both have wider aspirations related to the world outside their community, and which are certainly connected to their middle-class background. George, who often appears indecisive to Cyril, describes himself as a common human being whose foundation in life is marriage (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter I, 264). Therefore, his real nature emerges as that of somebody who values the simple things in life, but whose existence is partially spoiled by the ideas inculcated into him by his middle-class friends. As a matter of fact, Black (1986: 47) sees George as contrasted with Cyril and as a failed version of Hardy's Gabriel Oak, while Cyril, according to Pinkney (1990: 26), remains an outsider to the development of the plot.

Chapter VIII in Part Two is dedicated to the friendship between George and Cyril. Cyril helps George with his agricultural work (*WP* 247), and the two young men are seen in unison with themselves and with Nature, in their admiration for its creatures and their simple life. The affection that Cyril longs for is actually manifested in his envy for two young larks and the warmth and tenderness they share in their nest (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter VIII, 246-247); Cyril gains this affection, if only during his youth, from his friendship with George.

At the end of the novel, George's decline – related to his alcoholism – is inexorable: he suffers from delirium tremens, and eventually has to leave his

home to move in with Emily and her husband Tom. Like Mr Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, George is alienated from his family, and his youngest son hates him, as William, Paul, and Annie do in the later novel. On the final meeting between George and Cyril, Lawrence provides a simile between George's decaying status and the approaching death of a tree, which is in contrast with the usually healthy life of farmers and peasants, and with George's previous vigour (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter VIII, 359).

At the beginning of Chapter II, Part Three, the narrator announces the imminent changes in the protagonists' lives that will lead them outside the Nethermere valley (*WP* 277). In fact, soon after the harvest, the Saxtons leave the mill and their native place. George "was going to take over his father's milk business, and was going to farm enough of the land attaching to the Inn to support nine or ten cows" (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter II, 280). Among the others,

Emily was the first to depart finally from the Mill. She went to a school in Nottingham, and shortly afterwards Mollie, her younger sister, went to her. In October I moved to London. Lettie and Leslie were settled in their home in Brentwood, Yorkshire. We all felt very keenly our exile from Nethermere. (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter II, 280)

As the passage shows, leaving the mill and the Nethermere area brings about nostalgia for the native place.

The abandonment of the native place has a profound effect on Cyril and Emily, less so on the other Saxtons. Emily seems enthusiastic about her new life away from home (she has later moved to Brayford). Mr Saxton appears positive, because he sees the moving as an opportunity to experience a different, more satisfying life away from his native place, as he explains in a letter to Cyril (*WP*,



Part Three, Chapter III, 289-290). Nethermere has thus become unproductive and monotonous, and has little left to offer to farmers.

Cyril is initially nostalgic (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter III, 287-288), because he feels exiled from the security of the world he has known until then, a world where the beauty of Nature is particularly poignant. The memories of the good old days in the Nethermere valley fill the vacuum imposed on him by the strangeness of the city, which is once again represented in contrast with the country, and appears degrading and depressing.

Cyril, however, learns to appreciate London, but it is because initially he transposes some of the naturalistic countryside elements of his native place (flowers, bees, and light) into the city (but the light is artificial) (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter III, 291-292). Thus, it is possible to see Cyril as the outsider in London who gradually adapts himself to its rhythms and colours by focusing on those elements that contributed to his happiness in his native valley of Nethermere: plants, flowers, and insects. At the same time, the image of home is also beginning to fade and to become less relevant.

When Cyril returns home, he sees the limits of the Nethermere valley, which has become insufficient and ridiculous:

I went home to Woodside early in September [...]. It was strange that everything was so different. Nethermere even had changed. Nethermere was no longer a complete, wonderful little world that held us charmed inhabitants. It was a small, insignificant valley lost in the spaces of the earth [...]. The old symbols were trite and foolish. (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter III, 295)

Like 'Ntoni Malavoglia, Cyril realises that he can no longer establish himself back in his native place. It is a small world that offers no opportunities, like Aci

Trezza for 'Ntoni. The difficulty in readapting oneself to the native environment and region is a theme that is very often explored in regional fiction. As we have also seen in Verga, Deledda, and Hardy, in order to be able to re-establish themselves within the native local community, the 'regional' characters who have experienced life in the outside world (in the city, in the nation, or even in a foreign country) must have either strong familial ties – for example in the case of Deledda's Elias Portolu, or a specific social purpose in mind, like Hardy's Clym Yeobright. Moreover, the true regional characters find it very difficult to leave their native area, and they do so only if forced by unfavourable circumstances (a terminally-ill Mastro-don Gesualdo leaves Vizzini to be looked after by his daughter in Palermo), or in order to improve their professional and social status (Alfio Mosca and 'Ntoni leave Aci Trezza to find employment, and Clym Yeobright goes to Paris for the same reason). Padron 'Ntoni, instead, makes every effort to support his family by staying in Aci Trezza, because he believes in accepting what the local environment can offer in economic and professional terms. In this sense, it can be argued that the true regional characters of *The White Peacock* are George, Meg, and especially his sister Emily, who is perfectly at ease in her native countryside, while, as we shall see, Cyril and also Lettie eventually become outsiders to the valley of Nethermere.

In fact, in Chapter VII, Part Three, Cyril faces once more his return to his native area. His experience is again that of somebody who cannot re-integrate himself there, who feels like a nostalgic outsider and is ostracised and alienated by Nature and by the place of his youth. Lawrence analyses Cyril's feelings in detail:

I wandered around Nethermere, which had now forgotten me [...]. Along the shore the wild birds rose, flapping in expostulation as I passed, peewits mewing fiercely round my head [...]. I was a stranger, an intruder [...]. Finches went leaping past in bright flashes, and a robin sat and asked rudely: "Hello! Who are you?" [...] The valley of Nethermere had cast me out many years before, while I had fondly believed it cherished me in memory. (*WP* 338-339)

Life and Nature in the Nethermere valley have gone on without Cyril. The passage once more offers various examples of 'pathetic fallacy', and the local flora and fauna – birds in particular – 'address' the narrator and question his presence there.

This novel is also characterised by Mr Beardsall's absence – he and his wife are estranged, and he dies early in the novel. His father's absence makes Cyril more dependent on substitute paternal figures, such as George, and Annable the gamekeeper. The latter is presented as "a broad, burly, black-faced fellow" (*WP*, Part One, Chapter VI, 72), and is also, like young George, a strong man in unison with Nature. Lawrence's wish that man return to a more harmonious relation with Nature is exemplified in the gamekeeper's ideology and lifestyle illustrated in the following passage:

He was a man of one idea: – that all civilisation was the painted fungus of rottenness. He hated any sign of culture [...]. He was a thorough materialist – he scorned religion and all mysticism [...]. "Be a good animal, true to your animal instinct," was his motto. With all this, he was fundamentally very unhappy – and he made me also wretched. (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter II, 164-165)

Here, Annable seems to incarnate D. H. Lawrence's philosophy of life.<sup>45</sup> The gamekeeper's unhappiness and sudden death (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter II, 172) are however the sign of the impossibility of erasing civilisation and culture from human life. In fact, it is not feasible to return completely to a primitive life, but

only by balancing primitivism and civilisation could humanity find some sort of serenity in life. Annable cannot be considered a fully 'regional' character, not only because of his previous experiences in Leicestershire as a curate (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter II, 168) and husband of an aristocrat, but especially because he is not integrated into the community, probably because he denounced many local people for poaching. In fact, "All the world hated him – to the people in the villages he was like a devil of the woods" (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter II, 164). His 'regionalism' can be found only in relation to his job, common in rural areas, and for his love of the local environment.

Therefore, in *The White Peacock*, only few characters can be defined as properly regional. In my opinion, as anticipated above, George, his sister Emily, and possibly his passionate wife Meg, remain regional – that is, strongly related to the Nethermere area in their residence and professions. They all, in fact, repudiate city life and opportunities, and choose to adapt themselves to the economic and professional changes that occurred in their community, although George and his wife also reach a more prosperous economic situation through her grandmother's inheritance. They remain integrated with the Nethermere valley, but in George's case, they end up isolated within their family. On the other hand, Cyril, Lettie and Leslie overcome their origins and prefer more challenging professions or lifestyles to be practiced in cities or abroad. In the end, they are outsiders – especially Cyril – to the Nethermere Valley, and fully maintain their middle-class values.

Lawrence's physical description of his characters is also employed in *Sons and Lovers*. In fact, Chapter I, Part One of the novel includes the presentation of Mrs Gertrude Morel: "She was thirty-one years old, and had been married eight years. A rather small woman, of delicate mould but resolute bearing" (*SL* 4). Mrs Morel's background is that of a good, middle-class family, and she later appears a modern woman when she joins the Women's Guild. Immediately after her presentation there follows that of her husband, Walter Morel, a miner (*SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 4). Lawrence often emphasises Mr Morel's vigour, spontaneity and fun-loving attitude (*SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 7-8), and also his beauty, especially as a young man (*SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 11). Lawrence also presents the meeting of Gertrude and Walter at a Christmas party. He stresses their differences in social status, in their manners and in personality: it appears the 'union of two opposites', of the self-controlled and reserved Gertrude Coppard, and the warm, smart, good-looking Walter Morel, four years her senior.<sup>46</sup>

After their first son William is born, Lawrence emphasises especially the gradual detachment between Mrs Morel and her husband (*SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 14). In Chapter II, Part One, which describes Mr Morel's habits at home and at work, and his love for the simple pleasures in life, the focus is often put on Mr Morel's alienation within his family, especially when his children take their mother's side against him. The situation worsens after Morel starts beating his wife and William.

However, a good relationship between Morel and his children is established when he is busy doing something at home: "These happy evenings could not take



place unless Morel had some job to do" (*SL*, Part One, Chapter IV, 59). Mr Morel, in fact, finds refuge from the alienation of his family life in his work.

His colleagues, the miners, are also portrayed as hard-working and vivacious men (*SL*, Part One, Chapter II, 29). Naturally, they are active and integrated members of the mining community. In fact, the community at the Bottoms is also described:

In the afternoon the Bottoms was intolerable. Every inhabitant remaining was out of doors. The women, in twos and threes, bareheaded and in white aprons, gossiped in the alley between the blocks. Men, having a rest between drinks sat on their heels and talked. (*SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 20)

This passage reminds us of *I Malavoglia*, where Verga often describes the local people (especially women) sitting outside their houses and chatting. The familiarity among the members of the community illustrates their solidarity and union, to which Mrs Morel does not fully belong. In fact, she is not at ease within the community, or within her marriage.

Despite the fact that Mrs Morel appears different from the other miners' wives at the Bottoms, there is, however, also a certain level of solidarity among them in case of need, as when Mrs Morel's labour starts (*SL*, Part One, Chapter II, 27-28). Moreover, the Bestwood mining community also helps the Morels when Mr Morel has an accident and is taken seriously ill. Morel's illness, from which he gradually recovers, also reunites the couple. They eventually have another baby, Arthur who, unlike his brothers and sister, likes his father very much.

Despite the emotional and economic tensions in the Morels' home, family values are always very important, as is highlighted when William returns home for Christmas:

Everybody was mad with happiness in the family. Home was home, and they loved it with a passion of love, whatever the suffering had been. There were parties, there were rejoicings. People came in to see William, to see what difference London had made to him. And they all found him "such a gentleman, and such a fine fellow, my word!" (*SL*, Part One, Chapter IV, 73)

This passage can also be compared to 'Ntoni's first return from the military service in *I Malavoglia*, when his family, friends and acquaintances celebrate him. However, the family is soon struck by William's death of pneumonia and erysipelas (*SL*, Part One, Chapter VI, 119).

A fundamental relation in the novel is that between Paul and his mother, on which much has been written, and which has usually been seen as oedipal. Mrs Morel's feelings for him are peculiar from his birth (*SL*, Part One, Chapter II, 33-34). As children, William and Paul are alike. The former is described as having a split personality, as being indecisive and dependent on his mother. Similarly, Paul is seen as a conscious, fragile, and sensitive child who loves the country, and sees his mother as his most important companion. As an adult, however, William is portrayed as a strong and successful individual – first as a student and later as an employee – and is promoted from Nottingham to London (*SL*, Part One, Chapter III, 50), while the teenager Paul is seen as unambitious, still too attached to his mother, and only willing to become a painter. When he is fourteen, however, Paul gets a job as a junior clerk in a Nottingham factory for surgical appliances, which he likes, and the conditions of which improve, with time: in fact, he is offered more free time to pursue his painting. This presents an opportunity to detach

himself from his mother, and to gradually become more psychologically independent from her.

Moreover, although Paul declares that he does not believe in class differences, but in individual ones, probably as Lawrence did, he avoids socialising with his father's friends and colleagues, who are seen by Paul himself as "rather different" (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter X, 223); Paul's view is also shared by William. In his lack of respect and interest for the miners, Paul, like his brother, is actually repudiating the values of his native community. In this sense, Martin's belief that "Paul remains in his own class, amongst 'the common people' whom he likes best" (1992: 39) cannot be accepted, because of the young man's aspirations towards a bourgeois life inculcated in him by his mother, which will probably eventually lead him away from Bestwood and also from the East Midlands, as the open-ending of the novel implies.

Moreover, Sanders also argues that: "What is problematic in *Sons and Lovers* is individual character and personal relationships, rather than community, the larger society within which character and relationships develop" (1973: 32). It is true that the individual lives of the protagonists, and especially their emotional ones, are foregrounded in this novel. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the influence of their native environment and family background plays a decisive role in their psychological and professional evolution. Both Paul and William, by denying their father and his drunkenness, violence and ultimately, his social background and that of his colleagues, reject the values of their native mining community that

he represents, and so they choose different professions outside Bestwood, also under their mother's influence.

As regards the Leivers, the representatives of the rural side of the Bestwood community, they are introduced in Part One, Chapter VI. Lawrence firstly offers a physical description of Miriam and her mother (*SL* 109-110), emphasising Miriam's beauty and Mrs Leiver's fragility. Later, Mr Leivers, a strong good-looking man, and his sons – big, condescending lads – are also presented (*SL*, Part One, Chapter VI, 110-111). Lawrence's emphasis is on the contrast between men and women within the Leivers' family, and on their differences and isolation from other people (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter VII, 129-131). They do not seem to be integrated with the Bestwood's community. Paul, however, joins them in their agricultural world: he is at ease in this environment, and he gradually builds a strong friendship with them, in particular with Mrs Leivers, Edgar, and Miriam. Edgar also reminds us of George Saxon of *The White Peacock*: "Edgar was good-looking, with dark, warm eyes" (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter IX, 201).

Miriam, who is also very sensitive and insecure, and whose only friend is Nature, has aspirations higher than her position of a farmer's daughter: "I want to do something. I want a chance like anybody else. Why should I, because I'm a girl, be kept at home and not allowed to be anything? What chance *have* I?" (*SL*, Part One, Chapter II, 135).

Paul's second partner, Clara Dawes, is also presented physically, and as someone who seems to scorn men (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter VIII, 162). She emerges



as an educated, self-made woman who defends women's rights. She is not at ease in the factory environment when she goes back to work at Jordan's, and as already mentioned, she does not like Nottingham and the impending advance of industrialisation. Her husband, Baxter Dawes, the smith at Jordan's (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter VIII, 162), is important for his contrasting relationship with Paul: they are initially enemies, but eventually become intimates during Baxter's illness and recovery.

The association between the landscape and the characters' feelings is another characteristic of this novel. In Paul and Clara's love affair, as also in Paul and Miriam's, landscape and Nature accompany their most intimate moments, during which passion is associated with the solitude of Nature. Despite Paul's love for his native countryside, Nottingham is 'the world', and is positively opposed to Bestwood. This contrasting view is also associated with his lovers. In fact, for Paul, Miriam symbolises the country and Clara the city (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter X, 240). Moreover, the factory becomes almost a second home for Paul (*SL*, Part One, Chapter V, 99).

Unlike Paul, Clara does not particularly like the city, also because the latter seems to be invading the countryside, although its advance is still limited (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter X, 236). In fact, as Michelucci also explains, Clara has an ambivalent relationship with the city: she appreciates its cultural opportunities but is alienated by her factory job (2002: 51).



Nevertheless, even though Paul enjoys the city, his attitude towards the world outside Bestwood is initially cautious. In fact, while his brother William is attracted by the world outside home, Paul appears less curious and willing to leave, and needs his mother's company to explore other places, like Willey Farm, Nottingham, Lincoln, and Mablethorpe.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, for Paul and his mother, the agricultural and pastoral setting of some of their expeditions functions as a release from familial tensions, and as a source of inspiration for Paul's paintings. Thus, in *Sons and Lovers*, as Michelucci also confirms (2002: 33), places are profoundly connected with the characters' experiences.

Paul also leaves home and moves to Nottingham after his mother's death, but the depression and annihilation he suffers after the tragic event almost destroy the positive effects that life in Nottingham had previously exercised upon him. Paul is no longer able to fully integrate himself there. In this respect, Michelucci, who also emphasises the maintenance of the dichotomy home versus city (Nature versus Culture) in both *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers*, also believes that, at the end of Lawrence's third novel, Paul does not choose to return home. In fact, he does not belong anywhere, and the final image of the city towards which he is going at the end of the novel does not represent Nottingham but a new place, and possibly even a foreign one (2002: 34 and 54), beyond England or Britain entirely.

As a matter of fact, the final pages of the novel remind the reader of the end of Verga's *I Malavoglia*, where a disheartened 'Ntoni realises that it is not possible for him to go back in time, and to be able to settle down in Aci Trezza.

Both 'Ntoni and Paul are tremendously lonely. At the end of *Sons and Lovers* there is also the contrast between city and countryside images, which were drastically reduced in the course of the novel: Paul does not belong to either of them. The country seems to symbolise death, an obscure future, while the luminous town is a metaphor for life, and Paul eventually chooses to go back to the latter: "He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly" (*SL*, Part Two, Chapter XV, 366).

In spite of their love for their native countryside, Paul and William repudiate the values of the Bestwood community, and their mother is not integrated into it. Thus, these characters cannot be considered properly regional ones. Mr Morel, on the other hand, is, together with some of the Leivers, the only regional character of this novel. In fact, despite his alienation within his family, he is certainly a member of the local community in his faithfulness and respect towards his profession, and a more natural way of life. He is also a regional character at the linguistic level, in his constant employment of the local dialect. Finally, Miriam can be considered a regional character only with regard to her love for her native countryside: in fact, as shown above, she has higher social aspirations than those of a farmer, and eventually joins the middle-class by becoming a teacher.

### V.9 Language

As Draper argues,

The loose, cumulative type of sentence [...] is the foundation of Lawrence's prose. Repetition is another feature which, though less constant, makes its appearance often enough to be regarded as a basic part of his style. At least three types can be distinguished: (1) repetition used for emphasis, to ram

home, for example, an indignant attack on modern society; (2) for incantatory, or hypnotic, effect, carrying the reader into the world of dreams and the unconscious; and (3) for satirical devaluation. (1969: 19)

Among Lawrence's critics, Ingram's analysis of Lawrence's language and style is especially significant. Firstly, he sees the influence of the language and rhythms of the Bible – especially in the short sentences beginning with 'and' and repetitions – on Lawrence's prose (1990: 24).<sup>48</sup> As we have already seen, the influence of the Bible is important also in Hardy. Ingram also highlights the artificiality of conversation in *The White Peacock*, and Jessie Chambers's and Edward Garnett's influences on the style of *Sons and Lovers* and on the novel form (1990: 29 and 44 respectively).

Ingram also points out that "the working out of Lawrence's prose rhythms depends both upon the alternation of long and short sentences, and the variety of clauses and phrases achieved within sentences" (1990: 64). Significantly, Lawrence was also able to create "a new language for the feelings" he wanted to write about in his novel, including those conveyed by focusing on a specific landscape or object (Ingram 1990: 72).

These linguistic and stylistic characteristics are certainly important. This section, however, will focus on the way in which Lawrence employs dialectal items at graphic and phonetic, syntactic (lexical and grammatical), and semantic level, in order to portray faithfully the language of the individuals and communities presented in his novels.

In *The White Peacock*, the usage of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire dialectal lexemes and expressions is limited to certain characters.<sup>49</sup> Examples of dialect are to be found in the conversation between Mrs Beardsall and a young boy when she goes to see her husband's corpse: "“She ’ad French Carlin – but he’s dead – an she’s letten th’ candles ter keep th’ owd lad off’n ’im.”” (*WP*, Part One, Chapter IV, 43, the boy is speaking), in which “an she’s letten th’ candles ter keep th’ owd lad off’n ’im” means “and she’s lit the candles to keep the Devil off him”,<sup>50</sup> and where dialect is to be found at graphic, phonetic, syntactical and semantic level. Moreover, the lady who looks after Mrs Beardsall’s husband before his death also employs dialect when addressing her:

“I must come in and settle things – I am his nearest relative,” said my mother trembling. “Yes – I must ’a dozed, for when I looked up, it wor black darkness. Missis, I dursn’t sit up wi’ ’im no more, an’ many a one I’ve laid out. Eh, but his sufferin’s, Missis – poor feller – eh, Missis!” – she lifted her ancient hands, and looked up at my mother, with her eyes so intensely blue. (*WP*, Part One, Chapter IV, 43-44)

Mrs Beardsall, as the first clause shows, uses Standard English, as her children also do.

Colloquial English and dialect are also spoken by the Kennels’ inhabitants, by Annable’s family, especially by his wife (*WP*, Part One, Chapter VI, 84). The following example has Annable as protagonist:

“A dove-cot, my eyes if it ain’t! It struck me I ’eered a cooin’, an ’ere’s th’ birds. Come on, sweethearts, it’s th’ wrong place for billin’ an’ cooin’, in th’ middle o’ these ’ere snowdrops. Let’s ’ave yer names, come on.” (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter I, 147)

Another character who speaks in colloquial and dialectal English is Meg's grandmother, George's grand-aunt, who addresses George in the following passage:

"Well, George, my lad!" she cried, in her querulous voice. "Tha' niver says it's thai, does ter? That's com'n for summat, for sure, else what brings thee ter see me?" "No," he said. "Ah'n com ter see thee, nowt else. Wheer's Meg?" (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter I, 157).

As we can see, George adapts his language to the circumstance, in this case his register to his grand-aunt's one. He does the same with Meg (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter I, 160).

Dialect is also employed by the minor characters of the novel, for example by the ones from whom Sam (Annable's son) has stolen a rabbit (*WP*, Part Two, Chapter IV, 202-203). Instances of colloquial, dialectal English are also found in Tom's speech to his father, and in the old man's one: "'Tha nedna gi'e me none,' said the old man. 'Ah'm non a proud chap. Ah'm not.'" (*WP*, Part Three, Chapter VIII, 358).

Cyril, Lettie and Leslie, even though they occasionally use dialectal items at lexical level, usually speak Standard English, and often employ a high register, and frequent quotations from the Classics (this is also how they speak to George). As a matter of fact, their improper register, their contrived and unsuitable language for the circumstances, are seen as some of the defects of this novel. In *The White Peacock*, language is thus used as a way to distinguish social status, or to conform to the social environment, or to show the characters' adaptability, while dialect is employed by some members of the lower class. Pinkney sees in the Nethermere dialect faithfulness to the agricultural landscape of the region, but



also an often more 'sought-after', even affected technique (1990: 14 and 21 respectively).

As regards *Sons and Lovers*, Black sees a structural function in the employment of dialect in this novel. He maintains that in Lawrence, unlike in Dickens and Hardy, dialect is not used by the lower class or by the 'chorus', but for example by Mr Morel, a main character, who rarely speaks in Standard English. Paul occasionally employs dialect, for example as 'his language of tenderness' directed to Clara, which is opposed to 'his language of consciousness' he uses with his mother and Miriam (Black 1992: 43). Arthur also occasionally speaks in dialect to Beatrice, his girlfriend, to express his closeness to her. Thus, it can be inferred that dialect is spoken principally by the integrated members of the Bestwood community, and thus not by Mrs Morel.

However, in the passage in which a pit lad tells Mrs Morel that her husband has been injured at work, she surprisingly adapts her language to that of the boy, employing colloquial English: "'Eh, dear me!' she exclaimed. 'It's a wonder if he hadn't, lad. And what's he done this time?'" (*SL*, Part One, Chapter V, 74); and, "'I'll be hanged if there is!'" (*SL*, Part One, Chapter V, 75); and, "'Eh, dear, if I'm not sick – sick and surfeited, I am!'" (*SL*, Part One, Chapter V, 75). For once, Mrs Morel is at home with the language of her community. Therefore, it is possible to identify in the passage the Standard English of the narrator, and the non-standard English of Mrs Morel and of the lad at an orthographic and grammatical level: "They ta' ein' 'im ter th' 'hospital." (*SL*, Part One, Chapter V, 74) and "I seed him

at th' bottom. An' I seed 'em bring 'im up in a tub, an' 'e wor in a dead faint" (*SL*, Part One, Chapter V, 74). Paul remains uninvolved in the conversation, preferring to carry on with his painting, and choosing the Standard language of the narrator.<sup>51</sup>

As already mentioned, the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire dialects are employed by Mr Morel and his work-mates. Their use also implies the cordiality and colloquial atmosphere among the miners. Paul's father also uses dialect with his wife, while she employs Standard English, as the following dialogue shows:

"Oh! Oh! waitin' for me, lass? I've bin 'elpin' Anthony, an' what's think he's gen me? Nowt b'r a lousy hae'fcrown, an' that's ivry penny –" "He thinks you've made the rest up in beer," she said shortly. "An' I 'aven't – that I 'aven't. You b'lieve me, I've 'ad very little this day, I have an'all." His voice went tender. "Here, an' I browt thee a bit o' brandy-snap, an' a cocoanut for th' children." [...] "Nay, tha niver said thankyer for nowt i' thy life, did ter?" (*SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 8)

As Sanders also maintains, while Mrs Morel employs the narrator's Standard English, her husband uses the local dialect. In this sense, he shows his integration within the community, while she is almost always the outsider. Her sons learn her speech and therefore also distinguish themselves from the other members of the community (Sanders 1973: 29).

Finally, the Leivers' children use dialect with Paul, thus showing their closeness and acceptance of Paul within their family:

"She dursn't," said Geoffrey. "She niver durst do anything except recite poetry." "Dursn't jump off a gate, dursn't tweedle, dursn't go on a slide, dursn't stop a girl hittin' her. She can do nowt but go about thinkin' herself somebody. 'The Lady of the Lake' Yah!" cried Maurice. (*SL*, Part One, Chapter VI, 112)

### V.10 Conclusion

The analysis of Lawrence's *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers* has once more demonstrated the difficulty in trying to categorise literary works into specific genres or sub-genres. In particular, both novels, as it occurs in the case of Kent's 'epistemological texts' mentioned in chapter I, seem to embody the conventions of different literary genres and sub-genres: the former is certainly influenced by the pastoral genre, even though it often appears to ridicule it. Elements of the *Bildungsroman* are evident in the representation of the coming of age of the protagonists and of the importance of their adult choices, while elements of the *Künstlerroman* can be found in Cyril's career as a painter. The conventions of the regional novel are to be found in the accurate representation of the setting, the Nethermere Valley, and of Nottingham – which also belongs to the same region (the East Midlands) – and of the social environment of London. They are evident in the contrast between country and city, the Nethermere valley versus Nottingham and London (a contrast which is however overcome by the first-person narrator Cyril). They also recur in the realistic historical representation of the changes that affected the local society in terms of its agricultural production and the rise in the mining industry in the area. They are manifest in the professions of some of the characters, especially George, who in spite of evolving from being a farmer to becoming a successful entrepreneur in horse-dealing, still partially carries on his family cow farming, while the bourgeois Beardsalls and also Leslie Tempest eventually become 'professional outsiders' within the local community. Finally, at a linguistic level, the conventions of the regional novel

occur in the employment of the local dialect, often adapted according to the speaker, as is evident in George and also Annable.

*Sons and Lovers* also includes the conventions of various fictional sub-genres: once more, the *Bildungsroman* certainly plays a fundamental role, especially because of the accurate analysis of Paul Morel's emotional and psychological evolution throughout the novel. The *Künstlerroman* is present in Paul's maturation as a painter, while the influence of the autobiographical novel is evident especially in the conflict between Mr and Mrs Morel, and in Paul's peculiar relationship with his mother, all of which are based on the Lawrences' familial relationships. The components of the regional novel are once more to be found in the representation of the local mining and partially agricultural community of Bestwood: in the contrast between country and city and metropolis (London); in the professions of the true regional characters of Mr Morel, his colleagues and of Mr Leivers and his sons; and in the employment of dialectal items and colloquialisms by those who are fully integrated into the community, such as Mr Morel and his colleagues.

Therefore, the similarities between the two novels are evident. For Black, Cyril Beardsall also anticipates Paul Morel as the prototype of young Lawrence, and Emily prefigures Miriam, both characters being based on Jessie Chambers (1992: 1-2). The same critic also emphasises Lawrence's initial establishment "as a working-class, regional, realist writer" (1992: 5), and he also points out that in

the early writings the regional setting and the working-class social background contributed to the authenticity of Lawrence and his works (1992: 8).

In conclusion, it is possible to agree with Worthern by saying that Lawrence's novels and works in general show not only the author's lifelong attachment to his native East Midlands community – also represented in the short story "England, my England" (1924), or in his essay "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside" (1936) – but also his constant search for the *ideal community* that accompanied him throughout his life (Worthern 1979: 183).<sup>52</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In July 1914, Lawrence was invited to write a book on Hardy for James Nisbet & Co., which he began in September 1914. In the following month of December he seemed to be willing to rewrite it. In January 1932, almost two years after Lawrence's death, 'Six Novels of Thomas Hardy and the Real Tragedy' appeared in *Book Collector's Quarterly*, while the 'Study of Thomas Hardy' was published among other essays in *Phoenix* (New York) in October 1936. Cf. *STH* xii and xiv; *CL*, letter to Edward Marsh, 15 July 1914 vol. I, 287, letter to J. B. Pinker, 5 September 1914, vol. I, 290, and letter to Amy Lowell, 18 December 1914, vol. I, 297-300, 298. Pinion 1978: 275-276 criticises Lawrence's interpretations and judgements of characters and Egdon Heath in Lawrence's *Study* and some inaccuracies: for example, Eustacia is of Greek and not Italian descent (Pinion 1978: 276).

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence himself declared: "Out of sheer rage I've begun my book about Thomas Hardy. It will be about anything but Thomas Hardy I am afraid – queer stuff – but not bad." Quoted in *STH* xxii; the quotation is taken from D. H. Lawrence's *CL*, letter to J. B. Pinker, 5 September 1914, vol. I, 290.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of Lawrence's analysis of Hardy in *STH*, cf. Langbaum 1985: especially 71-72, and 77 on the link between Wordsworth, Hardy and Lawrence, for their affinities in characterisation. Langbaum *ibid.* 82, sees Hardy as the first English author "to elaborate the sphere of unconscious motivation".

<sup>4</sup> This is also confirmed by Hochman 1970: 1.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *STH* 24: "What is Clym's altruism but a deep very subtle cowardice, that makes him shirk his own being whilst apparently acting nobly; which makes him choose to improve mankind rather than to struggle at the quick of himself into being."

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence *STH* 26 also believes that Clym "must identify himself with the system. He must live as Man or Humanity, or as the Community, or as Society, or as Civilisation".

<sup>7</sup> For more details of Lawrence's classification cf. *STH* 49.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lawrence's comment in his letter to Martin Secker, 24 July 1928, in *CL*, vol. II, 1069: "I have great fun reading Hardy's stories again. What a commonplace genius he has; or a genius for the commonplace, I don't know which. He doesn't rank so terribly high, really." However, in a previous letter to Catherine Carswell, 27 November 1916 (*CL*, vol. I, 488), he had defined Hardy's art as "lovely, mature and sensitive".

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence's admiration for Deledda's work is also manifested in two of his letters: cf. the letter to S. S. Kotliansky, 1 December 1916 (*CL*, vol. I, 489), in which he recommends Deledda's books, and also his letter to Katherine Mansfield, (? 20 March 1919), *CL*, vol. I, 581-582, 581: "Deledda is very interesting except the middle bit".

<sup>10</sup> For Lawrence's main comment on *La Madre* (1920) *The Mother*, cf. *SLC* 294. Lawrence on Deledda, *SLC* 292-293.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. D. H. Lawrence "Mastro-don Gesualdo, by Giovanni Verga" 270-279 and "Cavalleria rusticana, by Giovanni Verga" 279-291 in Lawrence 1955. *Cavalleria rusticana ed altre novelle* is the second title under which the collection of short stories *Vita dei campi* (1880) was known after the great popularity gained by the theatrical adaptation of the short story "Cavalleria rusticana" in 1884. Lawrence entitled his translation *Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories* (London, 1928). On the various versions of the collection, cf. Cecchetti 1968: 47-78, especially 51-52 on the title, and 189-212 on Lawrence's translations of Verga's works *Little Novels of Sicily* and *Cavalleria rusticana and other stories*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *CL*, vol. II, 669-671, 670, letter to E. H. Brewster, 2 November 1921.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. his letter to Edward Garnett, 10 November 1921, *CL*, vol. II, 674-675, 674.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Chomel 1980: 279. In a letter to Catherine Carswell, 25 October 1921, in *CL*, vol. II, 667-668, Lawrence finds Verga's language "so fascinating" (668).

<sup>15</sup> Two of Lawrence's letters, however, express the couple's disappointment at the material difficulties of living in Sardinia: letter to Eleanor Farjeon, 20 January 1921, in *CL*, vol. II, 639-640, 639: "We made a dash to Sardinia – liked the island very much – but it isn't a place to live in. No point in living there. A stray corner of Italy, rather difficult materially to live in." Also cf. his

letter to Rosalind Popham, 2 March 1921, in *CL*, vol. II, 644-645, 644: "We went to Sardinia – it was an exciting little trip – but one couldn't live there – one would be weary – dreary. I was very disappointed."

<sup>16</sup> On Sicilians' exuberance and friendliness cf. *SS* 13. Sardinians are more reserved and less suave, more bare and stark than Sicilians are (*SS* 55). Lawrence also found it easier to understand Sardinians, especially because of their more open and manly human approach, while Sicilians appear more evasive (*SS* 79).

<sup>17</sup> However, according to Hough 1956: 36: "The first version was begun some time in 1910".

<sup>18</sup> On the writing of this novel, cf. Chambers 1980: 190.

<sup>19</sup> Also cf. Pinkney 1990: 7: Englishness stands for homeliness, a warm localism.

<sup>20</sup> Pinkney 1990: 12 highlights the affinities between the settings and some of the characters of these novels.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Draper 1969: 6; Niven 1978: 5, 11, 37 and 58 (even though for Niven Lawrence's third novel is a *Bildungsroman*: *ibid.* 37); Pinion 1978: 141 (but he is against exaggerating the biographical elements); Slade 1969: 39-40; Beal 1961: 1, 14-15, 21; Hough 1956: 12 on both novels, 17, 23-24; Black 1986: 43. Black 1992: 100: *Sons and Lovers* as a *Bildungsroman* or as a *Künstlerroman*; Worthen 1979: 26-27 *Sons and Lovers* as an autobiographical novel; and Holderness 1982: 134.

<sup>22</sup> On Lawrence and the literary influences on his work cf. Chambers 1980: 97-98, and especially 103 on Lawrence's admiration for George Eliot and her fictional plan of the two couples and their relationships. On G. Eliot's influence on Lawrence, also cf. Pinkney 1990: 8-10 and Meyers ed. 1985: 53-62 and 67. Meyers *ibid.* 53 also confirms Hardy's influence on Lawrence's first novel in the representation of Nature and the rural setting.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Pinkney 1990: 14: "'Nethermere' derives from Old English *nithera* (down) and *meri* (lake)." 17-18: on Leslie Tempest as the representative of Britishness.

<sup>24</sup> On the influence of Aestheticism in Lawrence's fiction cf. Holderness 1982: 4-7. On the realist novel, 8-9 and 19 on Lawrence's realism.

<sup>25</sup> On Aestheticism in *The White Peacock* cf. Holderness 1982: 98-100 and 105-107, and Michelucci 2002: 7 on this novel as a decadent one.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. his letter to Blanche Jennings, 15 April 1908, in *CL*, vol. I, 4-6, 4.

<sup>27</sup> On the influence of the pastoral genre in Lawrence's first novel, and especially of Virgil, Chambers 1980: 107 explains that: "During one of the summer vacations when they together [Lawrence and Jessie's elder brother] spent some days thatching haystacks in the fields at Greasley Lawrence told me he had been reading Virgil's *Georgics* to him, translating from the Latin. This was while *The White Peacock* was taking shape in his mind."

<sup>28</sup> Against this view, cf. Ebbatson 1980: 54, who maintains that: "*The White Peacock* is neither pastoral nor anti-pastoral."

<sup>29</sup> Moreover, according to Nardi 1970: 43-44 and other critics, Miriam's character is based on Jessie Chambers, while Clara is possibly based on Louise Burrows, or Agnes Holt, or Miss Corke. Lawrence defined *Sons and Lovers* as "autobiography" in his letter to Mrs S. A. Hopkin, 23 December 1912, in *CL*, vol. I, 170-171, 170. Lawrence was also very proud of this novel: cf. his letter to Ernest Collings, 7 November 1912, in *CL*, vol. I, 156. He also considered it better than *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser*: cf. letter to A. W. McLeod (? 17 September 1912), in *CL*, vol. I, 146-148, 147.

<sup>30</sup> According to him (*ibid.*), Lawrence referred to *Sons and Lovers* as his "colliery novel": cf. *CL*, vol. I, 106, letter to Edward Garnett, 3 April 1912.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. his letter to Mitchell Kennerley, 5 October 1913, in *CL*, vol. I, 228-229: "I never did read Freud, but I have heard about him since I was in Germany" (228).

<sup>32</sup> For an accurate analysis of the rise of a capitalist industrial organisation in the mining sector cf. Holderness 1982: 48-49; on the 'butty system' 49-52; 50-51 on the definition of 'true' butty system, quoted from "*Report of the Midlands Mining Commission, 1843*, quoted in A. J. Taylor, 'The Sub-Contract System in the British Coal Industry' in L. S. Pressnell, ed., *Studies in the Industrial Revolution* (1960), 215-16" (endnote 7 p. 236). The 'butty system' is also mentioned in *Sons and Lovers*, highlighting the fact that it might have partially survived later in the century.

<sup>33</sup> Also cf. Modiano 1987: 33: "During the last decades of the nineteenth century the coal-mining industry was becoming less efficient", also because of the exhaustion of the best seams (34).

<sup>34</sup> On Aldington's opinion, cf. Holderness 1982: 95-96. Richard Aldington, *D. H. Lawrence: Portrait of a Genius, but . . .* (London: Heinemann, 1951, 8), quoted by Holderness.

<sup>35</sup> Holderness 1982: 144 also emphasises the absence of the bourgeois society and culture from the novel.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Lawrence's letter to H. A. Piehler, 17 April 1925, in *CL*, vol. II, 837-838.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of Man's relationship with Nature in Lawrence, and the various literary influences on Lawrence on this theme, cf. Ebbatson 1980, especially 25-26, 30, 241-242 also on influences of Meredith and Hardy, 245-247 also on those of Hale White, and Jefferies 247-249.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Blake 1989: 154-155 and 213-214, for the two versions of the poem. The quotation is taken from the first one, not in *Songs of Experience*, where the emphasis is on the dirtiness of London streets and of the Thames.

<sup>39</sup> On the *wakes*, also cf. Wright 1913: 304-305.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Lawrence, in *Sons and Lovers*, does not include the Easter Monday custom formerly very common in Cheshire, Lancashire, and the Midlands of "*Heaving, Hoisting, and Lifting*". According to it, the female inhabitants of each house were lifted on a decorated chair three times by parties of men. The women returned the compliment to the male lifters on the following day. This custom is described by Wright 1913: 294, who also mentions that, according to folklorists, this habit originally illustrated the Resurrection. Probably, this tradition was already extinct by Lawrence's time. Lawrence only describes the Good Friday excursion to Hemlock Stone and the one on Easter Monday to Wingfield Manor in *Sons and Lovers*, Part Two, Chapter VII, 143 and 146 respectively.

<sup>41</sup> Poplawski (1993: 49), who also discusses the similarities between Hardy's and Lawrence's respective religious views, explains, however, that "Hardy's Schopenhauerian conception still has strong overtones of deism, especially in its pessimistic determinism that depends on a distinction between life, which is controlled and directed, and the 'Immanent Will,' which controls and directs. Lawrence's attitude, on the other hand, is neither pessimistic nor over-deterministic."

<sup>42</sup> According to Poplawski 1993: 66, "*Sons and Lovers* represents Lawrence's first extended attempt at making a coherent synthesis of his belief in a vague cosmic life-force with a close analysis of individual human experience [...]. *Sons and Lovers* is also the first novel in which Lawrence seriously tackles the problem of developing an appropriate aesthetic to convey this connection between nature and the individual. In the novel, Lawrence tries to indicate something of his characters' inner natures and something of the emotional conflicts and harmonies that exist between them, through their relations with nature. The inner strength and vitality of the individual characters and of their relationships with one another are judged, that is, by the extent to which they maintain a vital connection with the surrounding natural world. Moreover, that natural world is seen to be 'live and responsive' in itself."

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of religion in Lawrence's later works, in particular in *The Plumed Serpent*, cf. Poplawski 1993: 151-152 (on his fully developed religious organisation, maleness and power).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *WP*, Part One, Chapter VI "The Education of George", especially 69.

<sup>45</sup> On this view of Annable, also cf. Bradshaw's analysis in *WP* xxvi.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *SL*, Part One, Chapter I, 10-11 on their meeting and on their marriage 12.

<sup>47</sup> Also discussed in Michelucci 2002: 41-43.

<sup>48</sup> Also cf. Black 1992: 18.

<sup>49</sup> According to Trudgill's classification, the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire dialects belong to the Central Dialects. Cf. Trudgill 1999: 41-43.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. "Explanatory Notes" in *WP* 363.

<sup>51</sup> The passage with the dialogue between the pit-lad and Mrs Morel is accurately discussed by Ingram 1990: 82-84.

<sup>52</sup> Also cf. Lawrence's "England, My England", in Lawrence 1924: 9-47, and "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside", in Lawrence 1961: 133-140.



## Chapter VI: Conclusion

To 'read' a set of conventions, the reader – a literary critic, a judge, a theologian, or whoever – must know the class to which these conventions belong. In other words, a reader must possess the ability to identify *genres*, for no text of any kind is ever genre-less. (Kent 1986: 147)

This analysis of the origins and historical development of the regional novel in Italy and Britain, and of selected works by Giovanni Verga, Grazia Deledda, Thomas Hardy and David Herbert Lawrence, has demonstrated that it is possible to define all the works discussed in this thesis as regional ones, in spite of the continuous interaction among different fictional sub-genres and modes within a single work of literature. Therefore, the initial hypothesis that regional literature could overcome national boundaries and constitute a *fictional sub-genre per se* has been successfully tested. In fact, all the novels examined here together for the first time share similar features, which can be related to the conventions of this specific sub-genre. Firstly, both the Italian and the British regional novels have evolved from the historical novel, differentiating themselves from the latter by their more circumscribed setting and more contemporary background. Moreover, the apex of this literary sub-genre in both countries is to be found towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, when the socio-economic and political changes definitely affected, even though differently, the literary production of both countries. The Italian regional novel of the late nineteenth century also showed some 'temporal affinity' with the contemporary *romanzo verista*, but it distinguished itself by the different role of the narrator.

While the British regional fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on a social reality that was undergoing rapid transformations, and especially on the contrast between the rural and the urban world and their respective values, the Italian regional novel of the time tended to emphasise the problems related to the contrast between the *region*, especially as a political and geographical unit, and the *nation*. Unlike the Italian regional novelists of the time, who tended to come from Southern Italy, British regional writers did not come from a specific area of the country; the latter, however, seemed to share a rural and working-class background.

As regards the authors and their regional works analysed in this thesis, in spite of the overlapping of different fictional sub-genres within the same work mentioned above, and of the influence of the tragic and realistic modes and of the Classics, they all belong to the regional novel in their adoption of the main conventions of this sub-genre. In fact, they can be classified among the regional novels because of their strongly identified and circumscribed local settings, which belong to the writers' respective native regions, and which have a fundamental influence on the characters' lives and on their community in general. Moreover, in most cases, the characters' professional choices also confirm their 'regional status'. Even though it could be argued that the lives and vicissitudes of the characters portrayed in regional literature may in certain cases be transposed to other external realities, and can therefore be seen as universal, their actions are nevertheless very much influenced by the social, cultural, and economic context of their specific regions, by their customs, and by the strong family and



community ties, which often also led to the contrast between individual needs and the expectations of family and community.

Other features that recur among the novels analysed in this thesis are: the contrast between the country and the city, with the important exception of *The Major of Casterbridge*, where town and country subsist harmoniously together; the representation of local traditions and folklore, which is certainly less relevant to Lawrence's works, and which focuses on religion in Verga and Deledda; and the recurrent insertion of local dialectal items and expressions in the respective Standard Italian and Standard English prose of the various works. In this respect, the percentage of dialectal items in Verga's works falls slightly short of expectations, because of the writer's recurrent employment of literary Italian and Tuscanisms. The interaction among the three characteristics that Wing considers the "constituents of what is generally defined as the regional novel" that is, *action*, *person*, and *place* (Wing in Page 1980: 98), has also proven determinant among all the eight works discussed in this thesis.

However, an unexpected development of this research is related to the difficulty experienced in identifying or establishing precise boundaries among literary genres and sub-genres. This process has in fact proved to be misleading. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the constant interaction and overlapping among fictional sub-genres that has emerged throughout the various chapters of this thesis could actually be seen as a positive element in literature: in fact, works of art usually benefit from it. Therefore, if one considers the degree of constant overlapping among the various fictional sub-genres identified in all the novels, it

seems appropriate to say that a genre or sub-genre may be *predominant* within a work, but also that it is often, if not always, integrated with some of the conventions of other genres or sub-genres.

As regards the limits of this research, it might be argued that the selection of different or more numerous texts by the same authors could have led to dissimilar results, or to the discussion of themes analysed only briefly in this thesis, such as religion or politics in both Hardy and Lawrence. However, the inclusion of more works by the same authors might also have proved detrimental to the quality of the analysis offered. In any case, the variety of works by Verga, Deledda, Hardy, and Lawrence certainly leaves room for further research in the field of the Italian and British regional literature.

Another unexpected issue encountered in the course of the analysis was the restricted debate on Verga's works *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* in terms of fictional sub-genres. In fact, in spite of the numerous and illuminating discussions of these works as realist (*verist*) ones, limited secondary literature was found that could assist their classification within the specific field of regional fiction, or indeed, other sub-genres. A similar situation was encountered in relation to the origins and developments of the Italian regional novel. In fact, much of what has been said on this topic in this thesis may be defined as a personal and deductive contribution to the field.

At this stage, it seems also worth investigating the present and future status of the regional novel. If we follow Snell's most recent broad definition (2002: 2) provided in chapter I, and his classification of current regional fiction in Britain and Ireland, and we therefore include works in which the localised setting is important, but which can nevertheless overlap with other literary genres and fictional sub-genres, it could be argued that the regional novel is still widely popular among writers and readers. In this way, Ian Rankin's detective novels, for example, which are classified under the voice "Edinburgh" by Snell (2002: 181-182), and James Kelman's, classified under "Glasgow" by the same critic (Snell 2002: 187), are also seen as regional works. Similarly, even the contemporary detective-fiction writer, the Sicilian Andrea Camilleri, whose novels are set in Sicily and include the use of dialect and realistic language, could be regarded also as regional ones. However, in my opinion, although the setting of the novel is certainly fundamental in helping to classify a work within the specific sub-genre of the regional novel, it has to be strongly supported by the other aforementioned conventions for the work to be included in it.

As regards the future of the regional novel, it seems, at this stage, uncertain. As this research has confirmed, genres constantly evolve: they may disappear, but they may also be resumed in the course of time, or more frequently, they are modified by the introduction of new conventions, or by features of other genres and sub-genres.

Thus, it could be speculated that, with the gradual disappearance of geographic, economic, and often political borders that is still taking place

especially within the European Union, and with the general globalisation process, the concept of the *region* will be further absorbed into that of the *nation*, or influence the creation of new forms of regional associations, as Draper's following comment implies:

The new world thus seems to be redressing the balance of the old, evolving a new regionalism which transcends the limitations of the past. It remains to be seen, however, whether it will be capable of matching the achievements of the old regionalism which grew out of the tension between 'centre' and province, and reached its peak in the work of Hardy and Lawrence. For that matter, the European old world can also demonstrate regional affiliations which spill across state borders; and further complexity is added by the existence of linguistic differences which both transcend those borders and create alternative allegiances within them. (Draper 1989: 8).

The association between region and nation has been a strong one in regional literature, especially in the case of Scottish regional literature. Works such as *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901) by George Douglas Brown – a novel that, especially in the typology of the characters, has many affinities with *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, and even with *I Malavoglia* in the representation of the local community – and especially Lewis Grassie Gibbon's trilogy *A Scots Quair* (*Sunset Song*, 1932; *Cloud Howe*, 1933; *Grey Granite*, 1934), which, as Crawford says, "celebrates a nation through a region" (*SQ* viii), and whose protagonist Chris Guthrie is the emblem of Scotland, certainly contributed to the ascent of this association.

In relation to this, Barbara Hardy believes that "regional literature, or more specifically poetry, 'does not become a genre unless it also becomes nationalist poetry, as frequently happens in war, conquest, or revolution'" (quoted in Draper 1989: 5).<sup>1</sup> Barbara Hardy's article, according to Draper, also suggests the main

dangers of the association between regionalism and nationalism, especially the fact that: "whereas regionalism may be either neutral or benign, nationalism tends to generate an aggressiveness which deforms the culture it seeks to protect" (*ibid.*). Britain is currently still affected by the political, nationalistic and cultural vindications of Scotland, and perhaps to a lesser degree of Wales, which have an influence on the literary productions of these regions and countries. Moreover, because of its insular status, Britain also seems to experience a contrast between what is politically and economically perceived as *national* versus what is seen as *Continental European*.

Furthermore, it might also be plausible that a 'regionalist attitude' might nevertheless still persist especially among regional *insular* authors. In fact, the maintenance of cultural and linguistic borders is generally facilitated and strengthened by the existence of geographical ones, as occurred in the case of islands like Deledda's Sardinia and Verga's Sicily more than a century ago. Moreover, the concept and role of the *region* appear to be still quite relevant at political, economic, and cultural level also in Italy.

It could also happen that writers and artists in general decide to contrast the globalisation process and to favour *diversity* by consciously choosing *regional themes* for their works, also with the aim of preserving cultural and linguistic minorities. This phenomenon might also involve especially those migrant writers who, like Deledda, Verga, Hardy and Lawrence, have experienced life outside their native region or country, and who, perhaps for nostalgic reasons, *reappraised* those places and choose to represent them in their works. Among the



contemporary ones, it is worth mentioning: the late Italian writer and academic Luigi Meneghello, from Veneto, who lived and worked in the United Kingdom before returning to Italy (*Libera nos a Malo*, 1963, *Pomo pero*, 1974); Carmine Abate, from Carfizzi, an Italo-Albanian community in Calabria, who emigrated to Germany and later returned to Italy (*La festa del ritorno*, 2004, *Tra i due mari*, 2002, *Il mosaico del tempo grande*, 2006); Romesh Gunsekera, who was born in Sri Lanka, but later emigrated to Britain (*Sandglass* 1998, *Match* 2006); and other numerous writers who, like them, left their native country for working, religious, or political reasons, but still find inspiration in their native land, or discuss their own integration in the new country.

Lastly, as Draper emphasises in relation to the British regional novel, the dominant relation between centre (London) and periphery (the rest of the country) has reached a new status: although, as he brilliantly puts it, the “centralising tendency is, of course, as strong as ever” (Draper 1989: 1), “there is too much energy and variety out there in the regions, and too little assurance of a God-given role at the metropolitan heart, to make such respect any longer viable” (Draper 1989: 2).

In conclusion, in my opinion a future for regionalism and regional literature should exist because, as the Italian critic Sisca argued, although we live in a globalised world, and in “a cosmic era” (1970: 94), regionalism, like individualism, will always be valuable, because by respecting our individuality and our origins, we also learn to appreciate and respect the ‘outside world’ and its peculiarities, and I would add, eventually favour *integration*.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Also cf. Barbara Hardy 1989: 93: "Regional poetry, I suggest, does not become a genre unless it also becomes nationalist poetry, as frequently happens in war, conquest or revolution."

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